Toru Shiwasu
師走トオル
タクティカル ジャッジメント SS 2
Tactical Judgment
はじめてのさいばん りろーでっど
FUJIMI
MYSTERY
BUNKO

Tactical
Judgment

山鹿法律事務所は
今日も開店休業中。
複雑怪奇な殺人事件は
熱烈歓迎！
クソつまらない民事訴訟は
おととい来やがれ。
逆転無罪の天才弁護士・
山鹿善行が
イカサマとハッタリと二枚舌で
あなたのクロもシロくみせます！

山鹿に憧れる司法修習生・一尺八寸東鬼（かまつかしのぎ）。
ルーキーを待っていたのは
実習とは名ばかりのおさんどん
生活だった!?

Tactical Judgment Vol SS2: My First Trial Reloaded

By Toru Shiwasu

Translated by waifutime

Proofreading by aceattorneydude

My First Trial: Reloaded **9**
My First Trial: Revolutions **55**
Finishing Move! Defense Attorney **87**
A New Theory: The Three Little Pigs **115**
My First Trial: Non-Fiction Edition **145**
Afterword **165**

「店員さんたいへんよ！　屋上から飛び降りようとしてる人がいるわ！」
「それは大変だ！　どうしよう、一一〇番か、一一九番か……」
「そんなことより、カメラ売り場はどこ？」

"Shop clerk, this is terrible! There's someone on the roof who's about to jump!"

"That's awful! What should we do? Should we call the police or the emergency services...?"

"Before that though, where's the camera section?"

はじめてのさいばん りろーでっど

My First Trial: Reloaded

"Hello, this is Yamashika Law Office."

"It's me."

" 'Me'? I don't recall anyone called that."

"…Are you an idiot?"

"Yes, I'm an idiot. I'm such an idiot that I can't remember you. Now, goodbye."

"I'm the vice president of the bar association you're part of, and I'm a man who can revoke the qualifications of an unserious lawyer at any time... Does that ring a bell now?"

"What can I do for you?"

"Glad we can cut to the chase. Let me be frank: it's about time for legal apprenticeships to start. This time, I'd like you to take on a judicial apprentice."

"I should've known... I'd love to say no, but I guess I don't have a choice, do I?"

"Glad you're catching on quick. You know you can express some preference for where you want to mentor, right? For some reason, this year there's a peculiar oddball who specifically requested you as their mentor. Everyone tried to dissuade her, but she wouldn't listen. Seems like she's got the wrong idea about you."

"Sounds like a future legal prodigy with a good eye for people."

"Let's pretend I didn't hear that. Anyway, as much as we're not thrilled about it, we've decided to entrust this apprentice to you."

"Well, well. I wouldn't say I'm thrilled, but I'll take her on."

"…When you respond positively, it feels like some bad omen. I'm hoping that interacting with a fresh-faced apprentice will remind you of your own beginnings and help you reform, but… well, I suppose it's a futile hope. Just do your job properly, alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll teach her all about the harsh realities of being a lawyer."

◆

Mother, I've finally made it this far.

It’s summer. For days, the temperature has been over 30 degrees Celsius, and today is no exception—it's a scorching day.

The commercial district lies a bit off from the bustling center of the city.

In one corner of that district, there stands a four-story building. For a top-tier lawyer’s office, it looks a bit outdated. But of course, a lawyer’s skill isn’t determined by where they work.

"I’ve finally… finally made it here…!"

Sweat dripping down my face, I looked up at the building, overcome with tears of emotion.

It’s been three months since I moved to Tokyo to become a lawyer after passing the bar exam.

Since coming to the city, I’ve had my share of troubles: getting stuck in automatic ticket gates when trying to board a train, being yelled at to move faster on escalators, getting scolded by bus drivers for not knowing it was pay-before-you-board, getting caught by street salespeople, and being pestered by guys trying to pick me up, who were far from my type. And of course, getting lost in the jungle of unfamiliar buildings.

But now, all that hardship is about to pay off. I came this far to become a lawyer and—above all—to meet my esteemed Mr. Yamashika. My dream is finally coming true. You’d have to be heartless not to be moved by this moment. My clenched fists trembled, and hot tears mixed with sweat streamed down my face.

Every now and then, passersby gave me strange looks. But after living in the city for a while, I’ve grown used to those kinds of stares. I don’t care anymore.

"Alright, let’s do this! I’m gonna give it my all!"

With my heart full of anticipation, I stepped through the door.

My name is Shinogi Kamatsuka. I’m 162 centimeters tall, and my weight… well, I can’t say, but if you go by BMI, I’d be considered slim. My eyesight isn’t great, so I wear glasses, but friends tell me they suit me, and I secretly take pride in the fact that I came second in a local beauty contest my brother signed me up for without telling me… even though there were only four contestants.

At the age of twenty, I passed the bar exam and started my journey toward becoming a lawyer. You might say I'm a prodigy—it does have a nice ring to it.

The bar exam is known to be extremely difficult. While there are no restrictions on who can take it, it's not something a twenty-year-old can easily pass. I fully expected to fail and treated it as a practice run for next year.

Why I managed to pass is still a mystery to me. The exam included written essays and oral examinations, which I'm terrible at. I have no memory of what I wrote or said. I've convinced myself that I must have passed because the person who took the exam before me was so brilliant that the examiners accidentally switched our scores. If I were told to take the exam again, I'd flatly refuse. There's no way I'd pass a second time.

But apparently, when it comes to exams, it's the result that matters, not the process. And so, I left my long-time home in Kyushu and made my way to Tokyo.

In order to qualify as a lawyer, you first have to pass the notoriously difficult bar exam and then undergo a year and a half of judicial training. This training consists of five stages:

First, there's the preliminary training, where you learn the basics of legal practice.

Then, there's the legal apprentice training, where you gain practical experience working under a lawyer.

Similarly, there's the prosecutorial training, where you work under a prosecutor, conducting interrogations of suspects and experiencing the actual practice of criminal trials.

Next is judicial training, where you gain experience with the trial process.

Finally, there's the advanced training, where you learn more in-depth law practices.

Aside from the six-month judicial training, each stage lasts three months. After completing all of this, you finally qualify to become a lawyer. Then, once you're registered in the bar association's official roster, you can officially call yourself a lawyer.

Just the other day, I completed the preliminary training. Today, I'm starting the legal apprentice training, where I'll be working under an actual practicing lawyer.

And for this training, I chose Mr. Yamashika's law office.

Lawyer Zenko Yamashika. I first learned his name when I was studying in the university's law department.

My professor had said:

"Listen up, everyone. In this country's criminal trials, the conviction rate exceeds 99.9%. Of course, this speaks to the excellence of Japan's police force, but the biggest factor is that prosecutors only take cases to trial if they're sure of a conviction.

Let me put it in simpler terms. In most criminal cases, the defendant has already admitted their guilt. Trials where the defendant asserts their innocence are exceedingly rare. That's why the conviction rate is so high, over 99.9%.

When you all become lawyers and defend someone accused of a crime, most of the time, you'll be handling cases where the defendant has already admitted guilt. Now, don't get me wrong; this isn't like those courtroom dramas or movies where a miraculous reversal happens, and the defendant is found innocent. That almost never happens.

What's expected of a lawyer isn't to win miraculous acquittals but to ensure the rights of the defendant are properly protected."

I'd heard that speech so many times since entering the law department that I could practically recite it myself.

Defending someone in an unfavorable situation and pulling off a miraculous reversal to secure their innocence—it would be a lie to say I didn't dream of such a scenario. Every time my professor laid out the harsh realities, I couldn't help but feel disheartened.

But one day, my professor added something unusual.

"...Well, there is one lawyer who manages to pull off acquittals in every criminal case they handle, though it's almost like a joke."

That was exactly the kind of lawyer I had always dreamed of becoming.

After class, I asked the professor for the name of that lawyer. He gave me a rather reluctant look but eventually told me. And that's how I learned the name of the undefeated lawyer—Zenko Yamashika.

There weren't many materials at my university, but I still managed to learn part of his astonishing career. At the young age of twenty-two, he opened his own law office. No matter how unfavorable the situation, he would simply believe in his client's innocence and pull off miraculous, hard-to-believe turnarounds, securing acquittals. A lonesome lawyer. His nickname was "Desk Breaker." ...Though that's a bit hard to understand. Apparently, it's because he often pounds on desks during trials.

So naturally, once I finished my preliminary training, I chose Yamashika Law Office as my legal apprenticeship destination. ...For some reason, people around me desperately tried to stop me, though.

◆

I took a deep breath and entered the building. There was no reception desk inside, only a display panel showing the building's layout and an intercom with a bunch of buttons like a telephone. The path further inside was blocked by an automatic door.

In the past, I didn’t know how to open doors like these and ended up wandering around for thirty minutes before the police were called on me as a suspicious person. But now, with experience under my belt, I understood. This is what’s called an "auto-lock" system, and you can't enter unless someone inside the building lets you in by opening the door.

I found the name "Yamashika Law Office" in the building directory and entered the room number listed next to it. Shortly after, I heard a ringing sound, just like a phone.

This is it. My heart pounded as I waited for someone to answer. It could be Mr. Yamashika himself. I practiced my greeting, making sure I wouldn't stumble over my words.

"Hmm, aah, ahem ahem. Alright, perfect."

'Um, I’m the judicial apprentice scheduled to visit you today, my name is Shinogi Kamatsuka.' …Alright, just like always. At the very least, I’m quite the talker. Back in the day, when I was the narrator for "Lemontaro"—a twist on "Momotaro"—at a school play, I remember being praised a lot for it.

Finally, I heard the sound of someone picking up on the speaker. My heart raced, and I squeezed out my words.

"Um, I’m the judicial apprentice scheduled to visit you today—"

“We don’t want any newspapers.”

Click. Beep, beep, beep...

...Huh?

In a panic, I called Yamashika Law Office again.

"Uh, um, I’m not here to sell newspapers—"

“We’re not interested in religion either.”

Click. Beep, beep, beep...

...What?

I called for the third time.

"I don't know what company you're from, but you're pretty persistent. I'll sue you for trespassing, you know?"

I was starting to get a little mad. He hadn't even bothered to hear me out, and then he says something so nasty. There's no way someone like this could be Mr. Yamashika. How could such a rude person be working at the same law office as him?

But still, I wouldn't get anywhere if I didn't get the door open. So, I spoke quickly, not giving him a chance to cut me off.

"Sorry, I'm not here to solicit anything! I'm the judicial apprentice scheduled to visit you today!"

There was silence on the other end. After a moment of quiet,

"...Isn't today Wednesday?"

"It's Thursday!"

"..."

Finally, the door opened, and the intercom went silent.

Not even an apology. Honestly, I couldn't believe someone like this was sharing the same workspace as the legendary Mr. Yamashika, who tirelessly believed in his clients and secured acquittals. Well, maybe it just goes to show how broad-minded Mr. Yamashika is.

I took the stairs up to the second floor. Before long, in the dim hallway, I found a sign that seemed hastily put together—"Yamashika Law Office."

I knocked on the door.

"It's open. Just come in."

It was that rude man's voice again. His tone was as arrogant as ever, with not a shred of politeness. Sure, I'm just a judicial apprentice and, from the law office's perspective, probably

just a burden. But still, this attitude was too much. Whoever this guy was, he could certainly learn a thing or two from Mr. Yamashika’s sincerity.

I opened the door and stepped inside.

The office was quite small. In a room no bigger than twenty square meters, there was a bookshelf crammed with books, as you'd expect from a law office. There were also two sofas, presumably for clients, a table, and a television.

...What I saw there was an unusual scene. On one of the sofas, a girl who looked about middle school-aged, wearing a school uniform, was reading a thick book. On the other sofa... a tall man with long hair was lying down, fast asleep.

Yeah, this guy couldn’t be Mr. Yamashika either. There’s no way Mr. Yamashika would be napping in the middle of the day, and besides, he wasn’t even wearing the golden badge that signifies he’s a lawyer.

The girl reading the book looked up at me as if to say, "Who’s this?" I noticed something strange. The thick book she was reading was titled "Lenin’s Thoughts." And then there was the bookshelf in the corner of the room. Among the volumes of Supreme Court case collections and law books, there were also titles like "Mao's Quotations," "The Road to Communism," and "Mein Kampf"... Could it be that Mr. Yamashika holds these kinds of beliefs?

At the back of the room, there was a desk and chair that seemed to be for work. A man was sitting there, reading the newspaper.

His face was generally well-formed, but his sharp eyes seemed to intimidate everything they gazed upon. The collar of his sloppily worn suit bore the golden badge that identified him as a lawyer. His large, sturdy hands seemed to embody the nickname "Desk Breaker"...

...At that moment, I had a terrible feeling.

"Hey, you made it. Sorry, I’ve been losing track of what day it is lately."

It was the voice I’d been hearing all along. And there didn’t seem to be anyone else in the office.

I felt dizzy.

All the evidence pointed to one conclusion: this lazy, arrogant man was none other than the famous Mr. Yamashika. This rude, blunt man—this was the very lawyer I had been dreaming of, the one I had admired for so long!

The ideal image I had built up of this lawyer was crumbling to pieces.

"Hey, what's wrong? You don't look so good. If you're gonna puke, do it outside. Cleaning up the office would be a pain."

"N-No, I'm fine, don't worry about me..."

Come on, pull yourself together, me. You can't let something like this get you down.

That's right, I've always prided myself on my quick adaptability.

Yeah, let's rethink this. Even if he's a bit rude and lacks manners, that has nothing to do with his ability as a lawyer. Did I come here to learn etiquette from him? No, what I want to learn from him is how to win acquittals in court. That's all that matters. Let's just forget about that little bit of rudeness I experienced.

I pulled myself together and approached Mr. Yamashika's desk. First things first, I needed to introduce myself. After all, I'd be under his care for the next three months, and I needed to make a good first impression.

I bowed deeply.

"N-Nice to meet you, Mr. Yamashika. I'm judicial apprentice Shinogi Kamatsuka."

"...Huh?"

Suddenly, Mr. Yamashika tilted his head.

"Shinogi... Kamatsuka? That's strange."

"Eh...? W-what's strange?"

"I thought the person coming today was someone named Higashi-oni Isshaku-hassun or something like that."

"Pfft! Ahahahahahah!"

All of a sudden, the girl from earlier burst out laughing. She was clutching her sides, laughing as hard as she could.

"What kind of name is that!? Isshaku-hassun!? That's one heck of a name!"

...I suddenly couldn't bear it anymore and cursed my grandfather, who had given me my name.

"U-um, actually, it's written as 'Isshaku-hassun', but it's pronounced 'Kamatsuka'."

"..."

Just like everyone who hears how my name is pronounced for the first time, Mr. Yamashika kept glancing between the document in his hand and my face several times.

"...That's quite an unusual name. So, 'Higashi-oni' is pronounced 'Shinogi'?"

"Yes, that's right."

In my village, names like this were common. That's why I never questioned my name and simply accepted it. I have two close friends, and we would casually greet each other with things like, "See you tomorrow, December 31st!" or "Good morning, 123!" By the way, "December 31st" is pronounced "Hizume," and "123" is pronounced "Hifumi." When written down, they might look strange, but when spoken aloud, they don't sound so weird. Hifumi was a cute girl.

However, outside my village, names like these seem to be considered bizarre. I can't even count how many times I've been made fun of for my name.

And this Mr. Yamashika, who had tried to turn me away at the door, surely he'd make fun of me too...

But, that was a misunderstanding on my part.

"I see. Well, it's not like a lawyer's ability is determined by their name."

"...Huh? Y-Yes, that's true!"

I felt a bit moved.

Since my first impression of him had been bad, maybe I had misjudged Mr. Yamashika a little. For him to accept my name so easily, he really was the lawyer I had idealized.

"Yeah, that's right," the girl from earlier said. "Your name is Zenko Yamashika, after all. Weird names like yours, it's like you can understand each other. If your name were 'Umashika' (Horse-Deer) instead of 'Yamashika' (Mountain-Deer), you'd probably understand each other even better."

"S-Shut up! Don't say such unnecessary things, and keep quiet!"

Mr. Yamashika shouted, his emotions clearly showing.

...'U-Umashika'... Now, that's a name I've never heard, not even in my village.

However, judging from his reaction, could it be that Mr. Yamashika doesn’t like his name much either? It feels a little awkward to share that sentiment with him, but in this situation, it’s probably best to say something supportive and leave a good impression.

"I think 'Zenko Yamashika' is a wonderful name! 'Zenko' means 'good deeds,' which is perfect for a lawyer! It’s just as great as the name of the doctor in my village!"

"Oh? And what’s the name of that doctor?"

"Uh? It’s Dr. Naoru Imanara, written as in 'You'll Get Better Now.'"

I thought I was trying to support Mr. Yamashika. But for some reason, he hung his head in disappointment, while the girl burst out laughing, clutching her stomach. ...Why? Mom, I don’t really understand city people’s feelings...

"...Shut up already... Geez... Always interrupting my nap..."

At that moment, the long-haired man who had been lying on the sofa spoke up. I’d been curious about him ever since I came into the office, and now I wondered even more. Who were this man and the girl? They didn’t seem like lawyers, and I couldn’t imagine someone who’d be napping in the middle of the day was a staff member at a law firm.

The man sat up, looked at me with an irritated expression, and asked,

"...Who are you?"

Scary. Mr. Yamashika’s gaze was already pretty intimidating, but this guy’s was just as terrifying. And since he looked annoyed, he seemed even scarier. I hurriedly bowed my head.

"N-Nice to meet you! I’m the judicial apprentice Shinogi Kamatsuka, starting my legal training here today!"

As long as he didn’t know the kanji, my name didn’t sound that strange.

But—why? The man looked at me with a puzzled expression, as if he were a child seeing the giant salamander from my village for the first time.

"...What did you just say?"

"Huh? I-I said, Shinogi Kamatsuka..."

"No, before that. You said something about legal training or whatever..."

"Y-Yes! I'm a future lawyer! Starting today, I'll be studying under the famous Mr. Yamashika for the next three months—"

It was at that moment that I experienced, for the first time, what it means for "the atmosphere to freeze."

The man's face turned pale, and his entire body stiffened as if he'd been struck by lightning. The girl, too, dropped the book she had been reading, and slid all the way to the edge of the sofa.

"A-Are you in your right mind!?"

"Don't be hasty! It's way too early to throw your life away!"

"Eh? Eh?"

"Do you have any idea how terrifying it is to learn anything from that guy!?"

"He punches people without a second thought, scams them, tricks them... That guy's like that! I don't even understand how someone like him can still be a lawyer!"

"Have you been through something so awful that you've given up on life? It's okay! Even if you're unhappy now, good things will come your way in the future! So please reconsider! It's not too late! Do you really want your family to be too ashamed to ever leave the house again!?"

"Shut up, both of you!!" Mr. Yamashika yelled. "Listen, she came here on her own, after hearing about my great accomplishments. It's not your place to say anything!"

Then the long-haired man turned to me and said,

"...Are you sure about this?"

"U-uh... I think so..."

I was starting to lose confidence.

But apparently satisfied, the two of them fell silent. Still, a noticeable change took place. The two people who had been looking at me with suspicious eyes were now, for some reason, looking at me with sympathetic eyes instead.

Come to think of it, when I first expressed my desire to train at this law office, the people around me desperately tried to stop me. And now, these two were strongly urging me to reconsider as well.

Why was everyone so insistent on stopping me? It didn’t take long for me to understand the reason...

◆

Dad. It turns out becoming a lawyer is really tough...

The next day. It had been a little over three months since I began my journey toward becoming a lawyer. Yesterday, apart from just introducing myself, nothing really happened—but today, the real training would finally begin.

"Hey, Isshaku."

"...Uh, if you could, I’d prefer it if you called me Kamatsuka."

"Oh, right. I forgot. Anyway, let's start your training."

"Ah, yes!"

Regardless of what kind of man he might be, as a lawyer, Mr. Yamashika was someone I admired! My expectations were rising, whether I liked it or not.

"Listen up. Most lawyers end up working at some law firm or another. But to do that, you need to maintain the office, of course. Running a law firm isn’t easy. Rent isn’t free, and you have to pay utilities. If you hire staff, you’ve got to pay their salaries too. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

"That’s why I’m going to assign you one of the most basic tasks required to maintain a law office."

"Yes, I’m happy to do it!"

If I was going to learn something, I’d have preferred to be taught how to conduct cross-examinations in court. But what Mr. Yamashika was saying made sense. After all, I'll eventually be working at a law firm someday, so understanding the tasks required to keep it running is important. I still had three months of training ahead of me, so I figured I’d have plenty of time to ask him about other things later.

However—

"Good, that’s the spirit."

Mr. Yamashika handed me... a broom, a dust cloth, and a feather duster.

"...Uh, Mr. Yamashika? Um, these look like... cleaning supplies?"

"You can see that, can't you? If those look like law books to you, you should head to a hospital."

"Well, yes, but..."

"Alright, now for the basic office maintenance work. Dust the bookshelf first, then sweep and mop the floors."

"Eeeeeeh—!?"

...I had misunderstood. Mr. Yamashika was, after all, this kind of person.

And, I already had a gut feeling. Now that I was here, I no longer had the right to refuse.

I'm probably the only person who was immediately ordered to clean during their legal apprenticeship.

Even so, I worked desperately. Dusting my brand-new suit in the process. I believed that once I finished, I'd finally be able to ask the questions I really wanted to.

The girl and the long-haired guy sitting on the sofa—little Iyo Satsuki and Mr. Eiji Kageno, apparently—occasionally sent sympathetic glances my way. Not that they seemed inclined to help, though…

"M-Mr. Yamashika, I'm finished!"

"Hm, that was pretty quick. You can take a break now."

Mr. Yamashika didn't even look in my direction as he spoke, still absorbed in his newspaper. As usual, there wasn't the slightest hint that he planned to actually teach me anything…

This didn't seem like a good sign. I guess I should be glad he didn't stick me with some other strange errand. But at this rate, I was sure I'd end up idling around until the office closed for the day.

"Uuh, Mr. Yamashika…"

I couldn't afford to make him angry. I spoke up, my voice sounding pitiful even to myself.

“Hm? If you’ve got things to do, you can go home, you know?”

“N-No, no, no! Uh, well, I came here to study the actual practice of law, so, um, I’d be really happy if you could, you know, take some time to talk to me about being a lawyer…”

“Hm, can’t it wait? I’m a little busy right now.”

'What’s so busy about reading the newspaper!? Please take this seriously!!'

…At least once, I wanted to yell that out loud.

“Please! I won’t take much of your time, just ten minutes, that’s all!”

I bowed deeply. Finally, it seemed like my enthusiasm got through, as Mr. Yamashika put down the newspaper.

“…Tch, fine. Ten minutes, that’s all.”

“Thank you so much!

Um, I’ve heard a lot about your great achievements, Mr. Yamashika. They say you’ve won acquittals for all your clients and that you’re an unbeatable lawyer. I aspire to be a lawyer like you! I know it’s sudden, but… how can I become a lawyer like you, Mr. Yamashika?”

I heard a loud thud, crash, and bang of something falling.

I turned around to see that Mr. Kageno had fallen off the sofa.

“Uh, is something wrong?”

As Mr. Kageno climbed back onto the sofa, he muttered,

“N-No, well, it’s your life, so you can live it however you want.”

He said it with deep emotion.

Now that I had gotten to know Mr. Yamashika’s personality, I could somewhat understand the meaning behind those words. Still, there was no doubt that Mr. Yamashika was an undefeated lawyer who boasted an impeccable record in court. If I could hear such a distinguished lawyer’s valuable insights, I was willing to endure anything. I’d overlook his bad personality, even clean the office if I had to.

But—the words that came out of Mr. Yamashika’s mouth were shocking.

“Let’s clear something up. According to you, I’ve always won acquittals in the cases I’ve handled. And that’s why you respect me, right?”

“Uh, yes, that’s right.”

“So, by your logic, if there were a lawyer who won acquittals for people who killed someone but claimed ‘I’m innocent,’ you’d still respect that lawyer?”

I was at a loss for words.

“Uh, w-well…”

“You’re misunderstanding something. Listen closely. ‘Not guilty’ and ‘innocent’ are two different things. Innocent means that the person didn’t commit the crime but is being accused of it. Not guilty means that the crime couldn’t be proven in court. In short, sometimes innocent people are found guilty depending on the course of the trial, and conversely, people who are guilty might be found not guilty.

It’s true that I’ve won acquittals for all my clients. But do you think that’s something worthy of respect? Who’s to say that all those people who were found not guilty were truly innocent?”

I was dumbfounded. What he said was true, of course. But to hear it coming from Mr. Yamashika himself...

“Well, that may be true… but, Mr. Yamashika, haven’t you proven the innocence of many clients? Isn’t that because you believe in their innocence?”

Suddenly, Mr. Yamashika burst into laughter.

“Ha-ha-ha! No way! There’s no such thing as a client who doesn’t lie. If you take your client’s words at face value and defend them based on that, unfavorable evidence will come up one after another, and before you know it, they’ll be convicted.

Remember this. I don’t defend clients because I believe in their innocence. I defend them because they claim to be not guilty. While it’s true that all my clients ended up being acquitted, I have no idea if they were actually innocent. In other words, some of the people I’ve gotten acquitted might very well be guilty of murder and yet still be walking free in society.

But let me be clear about one thing—none of that matters to me. The only important thing to me is whether the client claims to be not guilty. Do you know why?”

“N-No, I don’t…”

A wicked smile spread across Mr. Yamashika's face.

"As long as they claim they're not guilty, I can do whatever I want in court. I'll be in direct opposition to the prosecutors, and that's when the real battle begins—a verbal bloodbath. I hate to crush your dream, but I became a lawyer because I enjoy that. That's why I don't take on clients who admit their guilt."

Mr. Yamashika made a fist with the large hand that earned him the nickname "Desk Breaker."

"I've always loved getting into fights with these fists. But hitting people is a crime, and it wouldn't be worth it if I ended up in jail. Not to mention, boxing just isn't my thing. Then I found a profession where I could fight legally… and that happened to be lawyering. Sure, these fights are verbal, not physical, but they're fun in their own way."

"T-Then, Mr. Yamashika, what do you do if a client claims to be not guilty but then admits their guilt partway through?"

"I'd recommend they turn themselves in. Though, sometimes a lawyer has to act against their client's wishes to protect their rights, so that's not always the case."

"So, to sum up your approach… as long as the client insists they're innocent, whether they actually committed the crime or not is secondary, and you just aim to get them acquitted… is that right?"

Without hesitation, Mr. Yamashika answered.

"Yeah, that's it. That's what a lawyer does, right? There's this idea that no matter who the lawyer, prosecutor, or judge is, the verdict will always be the same… but that's just a pipe dream. The reason I've been able to win so many acquittals isn't because all my clients were innocent; it's because I'm that good."

"N-No way…"

I was left speechless by the sheer shock of it all.

Mr. Yamashika, who had staged countless courtroom turnarounds. I had always believed that these victories were the result of him believing in his clients to the very end.

But that wasn't the case. To Mr. Yamashika, the courtroom was just a place for him to blow off steam, and his clients' acquittals were nothing more than a side effect of him doing as he pleased.

◆

I was about to lose all hope in life.

The lawyer I had admired in my dreams turned out to be a sadist, a lazy person, and on top of that, a selfish, self-serving jerk. Reality had shattered my ideal image of a lawyer, and what awaited me was a life of cleaning the office and running errands during my legal training. In other words, I had become nothing more than a gofer.

If I had at least been able to witness some part of Mr. Yamashika's work, maybe there would have been some meaning to coming here for my legal training. However, this man did not seem to want to work at all. Sometimes there were phone calls for legal consultations, but he dismissed them all with, "We specialize in criminal cases here," and when an actual criminal case like theft came in, he would reply, still reading his newspaper, "I'm a bit busy at the moment." To top it off, he would mutter, "Can't some complicated murder case happen for a change?"—a completely inappropriate thing to say. Well, I'm interested in murder trials too, so I get it, but still...

The number of times I sighed in disappointment increased day by day. If this lifestyle had continued for a few more days, I might have actually given up on reality and returned to my hometown village.

The incident that awaited me happened one hot Saturday afternoon.

Despite it being Saturday, I had been ordered to come to the office for maintenance—cleaning duties, followed by being sent out to buy lunch. I was sinking into self-loathing as I finished those tedious tasks, and Mr. Yamashika sat around as usual, leisurely reading his newspaper. That's when it happened.

"Big trouble, big trouble—! Zenko, help me out here!"

The office door burst open, and in came Satsuki, looking like she had just come from school.

At the sudden loud entrance, Mr. Yamashika frowned and muttered, "Tch, every time you barge into my office, you're always yelling. What is it this time? Has America turned communist or something?"

"That'd be interesting, but that's not the issue! Listen, at my school, we were taught that if there's a dispute, we should hold a classroom trial to resolve it, right!? Well, we're having one again today!"

Huh, a classroom trial? That's quite the unique—well, interesting—initiative for a school.

"I see. Well, good luck with that."

“What’s with the detached attitude? Listen until the end! This time, it’s different from the usual. It’s a case between the teacher and us students! I mean, sure, I’m probably talented enough to become a lawyer by tomorrow, but even I’m not keen on going up against a full-grown adult who’s had years to gain experience. Plus, if I totally crush him like usual, it might affect my internal evaluations. So, despite my reluctance, I need you to lend me a hand. Come to my school!”

W-Wow, just listening to her was overwhelming.

Mr. Yamashika certainly had a wild personality, but as they say, birds of a feather flock together; this girl was no pushover either. Sure, Mr. Yamashika had that kind of personality, but he was still a well-known lawyer. The fact that she could forcefully drag such a famous lawyer into a mere middle school dispute between students and a teacher was impressive, to say the least.

That said, even I, having only known him a few days, could easily predict what kind of reply Mr. Yamashika would give.

“You really think I’m going to waste my time on something that’s not even worth a penny to me?”

“Ugh! Come on, you’re not doing anything anyway! Don’t you feel sorry for us kids being bullied by adults?”

“No, I don’t. It’s only natural for kids to be oppressed by adults.”

M-Mr. Yamashika… Isn’t that kind of an inappropriate thing for a lawyer to say…?

“Ugh! Fine! I’ll keep yelling right here until you agree to come! Oo-oo, wa-wa-kya-kyaah!”

“Ah, shut up already. Are you a monkey or something?”

Clearly, Mr. Yamashika had no intention of going along with her. Still, Satsuki was persistent, continuing to cry out “Ooo” and “grr~” without stopping. As a middle schooler, she wasn’t exactly someone you could call the police on for causing a disturbance, so Mr. Yamashika just shook his head in exasperation at the noise.

What happened next was purely by chance.

At the moment Mr. Yamashika shook his head—our eyes met.

At the same time, I felt an overwhelming sense of dread for some reason.

“Hey, Kamatsuka.”

“Y-Yes!? W-What is it?”

“You said you wanted to experience what it’s like to be a lawyer, didn’t you?”

“Uh, well, yes, I did.”

Mr. Yamashika grinned.

I’ll never forget the look on his face at that moment. If demons truly existed, they would undoubtedly wear that same expression as they pushed people into misery.

“Alright, Kamatsuka. No matter what mistakes you make, I’ll cover for you. You’re going with this brat.”

“Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeh!?”

…My bad feeling hit the mark accurately.

“W-Wait a second, Zenko!”

It was Satsuki who raised her voice in protest before I could.

“What good is this rookie going to do!? She’ll just drag me down, nothing more! Don’t dump such a useless burden on me!”

Ugh… Why do I have to be insulted like this by a middle schooler…?

“Let me tell you something: there’s no way I’m going. A lawyer like me can’t be seen getting involved in a petty middle school squabble. Besides, while this one might be a rookie, she still passed the incredibly tough bar exam. She’s better than nothing.”

“W-Wait a minute, Mr. Yamashika! There’s no way I can suddenly be thrown into something like this! I don’t even know what a classroom trial is! You haven’t taught me anything yet, either!”

I threw in a little sarcasm at the end.

But of course, there was no way logic like this would ever work on him.

“Look, a classroom trial is just like any other trial, with the scale of the dispute being a bit smaller. You passed the bar exam and aim to be a lawyer, so you should have a good idea of how trials work. Besides, this isn’t a formal trial. Even if you screw up, you won’t be held responsible, and it won’t leave a mark on your record. You’ll gain experience as a lawyer. What better opportunity is there than this?”

Ugh… Grandma… People in the city are so cold…

I had somewhat realized it already.

I had no right to refuse. I didn't know what a classroom trial was, but there was no choice left but to go.

◆

Grandpa… The city is so unfair…

Why? Why am I here? I graduated from middle school years ago.

Second-year Class B, Akeno South Public Middle School. The desks in the classroom had been rearranged to imitate a courtroom. At the back of the room were the students who seemed to be the audience. In the center were a desk and chair that seemed to serve as the witness stand, and around it were the plaintiff's and defendant's seats. No one was sitting at the plaintiff's seat yet, but for some reason, I was sitting at the defendant's seat.

In addition to me and Satsuki, another girl was seated on the defendant's side.

"Hey, Satsuki. Is that person your assistant?"

Despite being a middle schooler, her way of speaking was oddly mature. And despite being a middle schooler, her figure was exceptionally well- developed… Ugh, even as an adult, I felt a little self-conscious.

"U-Um, nice to meet you. I'm Shinogi Kamatsuka, a legal apprentice."

"Oh my, what an unusual name. My name is... Uh, I'm Yoshiko Uribatake. N-Not that you need to remember it!"

She seemed somewhat embarrassed when she introduced herself.

Yoshiko Uribatake. Hmm, I feel a bit of kinship. Like with Mr. Zenko Yamashika, I wonder if there are more people out there struggling with their own names than I thought.

"More importantly, Satsuki, what do you mean by legal apprentice? Didn't you say you'd bring a real lawyer as your assistant?"

"It couldn't be helped, I was told he was busy! Well, even if this one's like that, she's apparently studied enough to be of some use."

"Hmph, we'll see about that... After all, she's just an apprentice, right? In that case, I should have brought my brother instead. Listen carefully, Ms. Kamatsuka, just make sure you don't drag me down, alright?"

"Y-Yes, I'll do my best to avoid that..."

Here I am, a twenty-year-old, bowing my head to a middle schooler. I could feel the sharp stares of the students sitting in the audience. Mom, middle schoolers these days are scary...

At that moment, the classroom door opened, and in came three people: an elderly woman with gray hair, a muscular middle-aged man, and a man in his thirties with glasses. They were probably all teachers.

"Alright, I'll give you a brief explanation, so listen closely."

Satsuki whispered to me in a low voice.

"See that older lady who looks like a grandma? That's Principal Yoko Kochi. She's going to act as the judge. The other two are the plaintiffs, in other words, the enemies. The younger guy is Mr. Yome Hon-o, the Japanese language teacher, and the big, bulky one is Mr. Shiro Undo, the PE teacher. They're the ones who started this whole mess."

…Wow. They say names fit the person, and in this case, it's spot on: "kochi" sounding like the Japanese "principal", "hon-o yome" sounding like "no good", "undo" like "sports". Could those three be from the same village as me?

Soon, Principal—no, Judge—Kochi took her seat at the podium—no, the judge's bench.

"Everyone, please quiet down. Now, I'd like to begin the classroom trial... though..."

The judge—or rather, the principal—looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression. Well, I guess I do stand out.

"Excuse me, but you are...?"

"Oh, um, I'm Shinogi Kamatsuka. Well, uh, I'm a legal apprentice, studying to become a lawyer, and, um, Satsuki asked me to assist her, so..."

Satsuki gave me a very displeased look, but said nothing out loud.

"So, Ms. Satsuki, this is the assistant you brought along?"

"Yeah, that's pretty much the deal."

The judge sighed deeply.

"Ms. Satsuki, you're not supposed to bring outsiders into the school without permission from a teacher, you know?"

"Yeah, sorry about that."

She didn’t sound the least bit apologetic.

"Well... I suppose you're right. If a middle school student is going to face off against a teacher in a trial, normally they’d have a representative. Ms. Kamatsuka, are you okay with this? To be clear, this isn't some serious case that requires the attention of a future lawyer like yourself. It's just that a bit of a misunderstanding occurred between the teachers and the students, and we're holding this trial to resolve it in a way everyone can understand."

"Thank you for your concern. Yes, I'm fine with it."

"Very well, thank you. I’m sure this will be a valuable experience for the students, too."

The judge smiled kindly at me.

I had to fight back the tears that were threatening to spill over. Ugh, in the past few days, I hadn’t been treated this decently at all...

"Teachers, are you alright with this?"

"Of course, Principal... No, Judge," said Mr. Hon-o, the Japanese teacher. "In fact, it might be better for the students if someone like Ms. Kamatsuka is on their side. It’ll help them accept the outcome more easily."

Hmm. That was a bit hard to swallow.

Sure, I’m a rookie lawyer, and at twenty, I’m still young and inexperienced in life. But the way Mr. Hon-o phrased it, it sounded as if he was assuming from the start that I was going to lose.

"Then, let's begin. Now, first... to be honest, I don’t know all the details myself, and since Ms. Kamatsuka is also here, Mr. Hon-o, could you start by explaining the situation? Or rather, could you give us your opening statement?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

Mr. Hon-o stood up energetically.

An opening statement from the plaintiff’s side right off the bat. The teachers seemed eager, and the students were watching intently. It seemed that classroom trials were more of a regular event at this school than I had initially thought...

"The incident occurred during the orienteering event last week at Futayama Pass."

Orienteering... That’s when you're given a map and have to navigate to various checkpoints to reach the goal, right? I vaguely remembered seeing Futayama Pass in the tourist brochures when I arrived in town. It’s about an hour’s drive from here and is a large hiking area.

"The orienteering started around 9:30 in the morning, and by 4:00 PM all the teams had reached the goal as scheduled. However... at that time, a certain violation came to light."

"I see. What exactly was that?"

Mr. Undo, the PE teacher, grinned at the judge.

"That’s what we intend to prove through this trial. If it's alright, I’d like to call the first witness."

"Very well, please call your first witness."

"Yes. Then... Ms. Satsuki, would you please step up to the witness stand?"

"Huh!? Me!?"

She let out a shrill voice. As the assistant for the defense, this was probably where I should raise an objection.

"Um, Your Honor."

"Yes, Ms. Kamatsuka?"

"Isn't it a bit unusual to call someone from the defense side as the first witness? I’m not sure that’s appropriate for a trial..."

Mr. Undo responded,

"Your Honor, I’m only trying to ensure fairness. Satsuki was the one who pushed hardest for this trial to be held, and surely she knows the most about the situation."

"Huh, I see..."

That made sense. I accepted it and sat back down... only to suddenly become aware of the sharp stares from the students.

Ugh, maybe I gave in too easily...

"Honestly, you're so unreliable! Fine, I'll go!"

"I'm really sorry..."

Apologizing profusely, I shrank back. Ugh, is this how the whole day is going to go...?

Satsuki soon stood at the witness stand in the center of the classroom. Mr. Hon-o then held up a small booklet.

"Ms. Satsuki, please answer my questions. You received this booklet about a week ago, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"And three days before the orienteering, all the second-year students gathered to go over it together, right?"

"Yes."

"At that time, you all confirmed the rules written in the booklet, didn't you?"

"Y-Yeah."

"One of those rules stated, 'During the orienteering, you are not allowed to buy or consume any food or drinks,' correct?"

"...I think it did, yeah."

"The teachers also repeatedly reminded you, 'Even if it's hot, you're not allowed to buy juice,' didn't we?"

"Y-Yes."

"Additionally, the booklet clearly states, 'It will be hot on the day, so don't forget to bring a water bottle,' doesn't it?"

"Yeah, it does, but..."

Aha, I see. I'm starting to get a clearer picture of the situation. Come to think of it, it has been pretty hot lately.

"Your Honor, the plaintiff would like to submit this booklet as evidence."

"Very well, it will be accepted."

Pfft. I almost burst out laughing.

A classroom trial, with teachers and students, happening in a middle school classroom. That alone was absurd enough, but seeing the teacher so fully immersed in his role as the prosecutor was just a bit too comical.

However—

When I looked around, no one else was laughing. Am I the only one who thinks this is strange...?

"Ms. Kamatsuka, you probably haven't seen this, so I'll give you a copy."

"Huh? Oh, thank you very much."

I sheepishly accepted the booklet from Mr. Hon-o.

The booklet was made by stapling some rough paper together to resemble a small book. The title read "Field Trip Booklet." I remember getting something like this when I was in elementary and middle school. It felt a bit nostalgic. On the second page, there was a section titled "Rules," and sure enough, it clearly stated, "During the orienteering, you are not allowed to buy or consume any food or drinks." There was also a mention of water bottles.

"Thank you, Ms. Satsuki. Those are all my questions."

"Does the defense have any cross-examination?"

The judge asked.

Uribatake glanced at me, so I shook my head.

"No, we have no questions."

This was just a confirmation of facts, and even I could tell there wasn't any room for cross-examination.

"Very well. The prosecution may call the next witness."

This time, instead of Mr. Hon-o, Mr. Undo stood up.

"Alright, for the next witness—" He looked around the audience. "Honestly, it doesn't matter who it is... Yoshino, why don't you come up here?"

That tone was very much what you'd expect from a PE teacher.

"Mr. Undo. A word, if I may," the judge interjected.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Certainly, we are in a teacher-student relationship. However, we are currently conducting a formal trial, and I would appreciate it if you could address the students with the appropriate level of respect."

"Uh, yes."

In short, he was being asked to use polite language. Mr. Undo looked a bit flustered but agreed.

The student who took the witness stand was an ordinary-looking boy. He seemed like a serious kid, and to be honest, he was kind of my type. I tend to prefer younger guys... Wait, focus on the trial!

"Alright, let’s get started. Yoshino... young man. On the day of the orienteering event, I caught you breaking one of the rules, didn’t I?"

"Y-Yes."

"What was the rule that you broke?"

"...It was so hot, and I drank all the water in my bottle, so I bought a juice from a vending machine. Then... you caught me drinking it."

"You weren’t the only one buying and drinking juice at the time, were you?"

"...No."

"The students around you were all buying drinks too, weren’t they?"

"Yes, they were."

"Your Honor, that concludes my questions."

"Very well. Defense, you may cross-examine."

Satsuki leaned in close to me and whispered,

"It was so hot that day! And yet Undo kept going on and on about how it was a violation... Kamatsuka, what do you think we should do?"

Despite everything, she was still relying on me. I felt a bit happy.

"Well, I think we should argue that there were unavoidable circumstances. But we'll get a chance to call our own witnesses later, right? For now, I think it's best to quietly observe how they proceed."

"Hmm. It seems you do have some knowledge after all."

Uribatake said. I felt a bit proud. But if I were to say something childish like, "Ehehe, it's nothing," I would definitely lose, as a person.

With our strategy decided, Satsuki stood and said,

"Your Honor, we have no cross-examination!"

"Very well. Prosecution, please call your next witness."

"For our final witness, we call Ms. Uribatake."

Hmm, now it's Uribatake's turn. Looks like the PE teacher is fully motivated.

With no reason to refuse, Uribatake stood at the witness stand, clearly displeased.

"Ms. Uribatake. After everyone reached the goal, I informed you all that some students had broken the rules by buying snacks, and I said I would conduct a bag inspection, didn't I?"

"Y-Yes. That did happen."

"As a result, we found empty cans of soft drinks in most of the students' bags, didn't we?"

"Y-Yes. But it wasn't everyone. I didn't have any in my bag either."

"By the way, Ms. Uribatake, the booklet also had this rule, didn't it? 'Take all the trash you generate during orienteering back with you. Even if there are garbage bins, you are not allowed to dispose of your trash.'"

"Y-Yes."

At that question, Uribatake visibly tensed up.

Mr. Undo turned back to face the judge.

"Your Honor, we would like to submit as evidence the empty cans we retrieved from a trash bin at Futayama Pass. We asked Mr. Rikayama, the science teacher, to examine them, and it was confirmed that a student's fingerprints were found on one of the cans."

I almost fell forward onto the desk. What kind of school retrieves trash from a garbage bin and has a science teacher analyze fingerprints?

Yet, as always, not a single person, including the teachers, showed any sign of amusement. Is this how schools in the city operate? Was my middle school the strange one?

"Hmm. Whose fingerprints were on the can?"

"They were Ms. Uribatake's."

The classroom buzzed.

Uribatake's face turned bright red as she seethed with anger. However, from the look on her face, it seemed like she really had thrown the can in the trash, and she didn't try to argue back.

Normally, this would be the part of the trial where you'd question whether Mr. Rikayama should be the one testifying about the forensic evidence, or how exactly they obtained Uribatake's fingerprints, and whether they had her consent. In a proper trial, these would be issues of human rights violations.

However. Ever since I started working at Yamashika Law Office, I've been increasingly unsure whether my common sense is still valid. Uribatake didn't seem to be denying anything, so I decided to stay quiet.

"Now then. Ms. Uribatake, the day after the orienteering event, an emergency grade-wide assembly was held, wasn't it?"

"Y-Yes."

"Please tell us what I said to everyone at that time."

"...You said that students who broke the rules by buying snacks would be punished by running five laps around the schoolyard."

"However, some students strongly opposed this, and that led to the current trial being held, correct?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Thank you, that’s all for my questions."

"Defense, do you have any cross-examination?"

Satsuki looked at me as if asking for advice. I shook my head.

"No, we have no questions."

"Your Honor, the prosecution rests," said Mr. Hon-o, standing up in place of Mr. Undo. "Our argument is extremely simple. We merely aimed to have the students who violated the rules make amends by running laps around the schoolyard."

The judge nodded, saying, "I see. Your argument is clear. However, the fact that this has escalated to the point of holding a trial suggests that the students have some unresolved grievances, correct?"

He looked at us. Satsuki stood up and said, "Yes, that’s right."

"Very well. Now I’d like you to explain that to me. Ms. Kamatsuka, I’ll be relying on your help."

"Y-Yes, leave it to me!"

It feels great to be relied upon, even if it’s just for a middle school classroom trial.

Satsuki and Uribatake leaned in close to me, as if holding a strategy meeting.

"Hey, Kamatsuka, you get the situation now, right? What should we do?"

"I’m willing to listen to your ideas. Of course, we’ll be the ones to decide whether or not to use them."

…Fine. I’m getting used to these girls’ personalities.

"So, the bottom line is that it was really hot that day, right? Everyone finished their water bottles quickly and had no choice but to buy juice, right?"

"Yeah, exactly! I’m sure it was at least 35 degrees that day! If you're forced to walk for six hours in that heat, your water bottle is going to run out in no time!"

"That’s right. Like I said earlier, it’s only natural to buy something like juice. What are we supposed to do if someone gets heatstroke?"

"Then we should definitely argue that point. Are there any students with weaker health in the group? Let’s call one of them to the stand and have them explain to the judge that 'if we hadn’t bought juice, it could have affected our health.'"

The two of them looked at me as if taken aback.

"W-Well, I guess that's about right. I was thinking the same thing."

"Y-Yes, exactly. You get about 80 points for that."

Once you get used to it, these two’s personalities start to seem interesting, even kind of entertaining.

"Alright, let’s do it then!"

Satsuki stood up abruptly.

"We call as a witness for the defense... umm... Suzu Hagimori."

"Huh? M-Me...?"

One of the girls sitting in the audience pointed at her own face, looking confused. …This has to be one of the most random witness summons I’ve ever seen.

Suzu Hagimori, who stood at the witness stand, was a girl who perfectly fit the word "delicate." She was pale-skinned, small, and looked like she might break if you hugged her too hard.

"Suzu... I mean, Ms. Hagimori. You participated in the orienteering event that day, didn’t you?"

"Yes, I did."

"But you broke the rules and bought juice, didn’t you?"

"Y-Yes..."

"Don't worry about it, Suzu. It was so hot that day! With how hot it was, of course you’d finish off your water bottle quickly!"

"Objection, Your Honor."

Mr. Hon-o stood up.

"Satsuki is making statements, not asking questions."

"Indeed. Ms. Satsuki, I don’t intend to be too harsh, but please follow the proper procedure."

"Okay, okay, I got it!"

"Now, Suzu. You finished your water bottle quickly, right?"

"Yes. I had already drunk it all by lunchtime..."

"And in the afternoon, it got even hotter, almost 35 degrees. I was drenched in sweat, my water bottle ran out... Were you okay, Suzu?"

"N-No... I'm not very strong... I started feeling faint. So did everyone else in my group."

"And so, you had no choice but to buy juice, right?"

"Yes, that’s right... We still had almost half the course left, and I was already feeling like I might collapse if I didn’t drink something."

Her testimony was more than sufficient. The judge looked at the witness stand with a sympathetic expression.

Satsuki glanced at me as if to confirm, "Is that enough?" I nodded in response.

"That’s all for my questions!"

Satsuki sat down, and I stood up to take her place.

This is the decisive moment of the trial. It’s about time I show what I’ve learned as a judicial apprentice.

"Your Honor, our argument is extremely clear.

This summer has been especially hot. The day of the orienteering event was no exception, and the students quickly drank all the water they had brought. If they hadn’t bought juice while following the rules, on such a hot day, they might have suffered from heatstroke.

Given these unavoidable circumstances, if we were to punish the students just because they broke a rule… I believe it’s only natural that they couldn’t accept such a decision."

At that moment—cheers erupted with a resounding "Ohhh!" followed by applause. Voices like "That’s right!" and "The teachers are being unreasonable!" could be heard.

Everyone seemed to agree with my argument. I was a little moved.

The commotion didn’t die down right away, and eventually, the judge banged on the desk.

"Everyone, quiet down. This is still a trial. Since we are conducting this in the form of a trial, this is not a place where you can just freely shout your opinions. If anyone continues to cause a disturbance, I will order them to leave this room as your judge."

Wow, the principal is impressive. The students quieted down almost instantly.

She’s courteous when speaking to me, but firm when she needs to discipline. She really is a good principal. Oh, how I wish someone like her had been the lawyer I looked up to.

"Excuse me, may I say something?"

It seemed Mr. Hon-o was intending to raise an objection as he stood up.

"What is it, Mr. Hon-o?"

"Your Honor, we have not yet conducted a cross-examination of this witness. May we proceed?"

"Oh, that’s right. Yes, please go ahead."

"Thank you. Well then..."

For some reason, Mr. Hon-o turned not to the witness stand, but to the audience.

"First, let me say this. None of us teachers, not a single one, wanted anyone to suffer from heatstroke. We fully understand that, considering their physical condition, the students ended up buying juice.

However, there is one thing I would like to make absolutely clear."

He now turned back to the witness stand.

"Ms. Hagimori. Do you believe breaking the rules is wrong?"

"Uh... yes, I suppose so, but..."

"Ms. Hagimori. This time, you and the others, despite having unavoidable reasons, broke the established rules. There’s no dispute about that, right?"

"Y-Yes..."

"Correct? All we teachers want is for everyone to take responsibility for their actions. You all thought for yourselves and ended up buying juice, even though you knew it was against the rules.

Thinking for yourself and acting on it—that's something even adults like us teachers find difficult to do. But you did it. However, when you act on your own decision, you must take responsibility for it. That's what it means to be an adult. And this time, you all acted on your own and broke a clear rule. Don't you think you should bear the penalty for that?"

"..."

Suzu fell silent, unable to say anything.

It wasn't just her. Even the students who had applauded me earlier, as well as Satsuki and Uribatake, were all silent...

Ughhh. This is bad. At a time like this, I'm supposed to be the one to speak up as the students' ally! But when I listen to what the other side is saying, it sounds like they're right. The fact that the students violated the rules is undeniable. There's no room for rebuttal...

"That's all we have to say."

Mr. Hon-o finished speaking gently.

The classroom fell into complete silence. Satsuki looked at me with pleading eyes, but... even I couldn't think of a way to break through this situation.

"...It seems we've reached a conclusion."

The judge said.

Indeed, there was no room for rebuttal. But is this really okay?

The teachers are solely focused on enforcing a penalty for breaking the rules. That much is correct. That's why everyone is silent.

However, it was clear from the expressions on the students' faces that they were still dissatisfied. I'm sure they were all thinking the same thing: "We had no choice, given the circumstances." But the fact that they broke the rules remains unchangeable, and the teachers are holding them accountable for that, even though there were unavoidable reasons for breaking the rules...

Ugh, this is a vicious cycle. There's no way to resolve a situation like this...

Just as I was about to lose all hope.

The classroom door opened, and a middle-aged woman entered.

"Oh my, Ms. Kobayashi? Is something the matter?"

"Principal, it’s urgent..."

The teacher, called Kobayashi, whispered something into the judge’s ear.

"Wha... what did you say!?"

The judge—no, the principal’s expression changed. She stood up from the podium and looked out the window toward the school grounds.

The students, curious, tried to approach the window, but the principal stopped them.

"Everyone, calm down and listen carefully. Just now, a suspicious person has entered the school grounds."

Whaaaat!?

The classroom immediately erupted into a commotion.

I couldn’t hide my surprise either. I mean, I had heard that there had been an increase in cases of suspicious people entering schools recently, but of all times, why now…?

"Please don’t worry, other teachers are holding the person back, so we’re completely safe here. However, for your safety, please do not leave this classroom under any circumstances for the time being, understood? Mr. Undo, could you come with me for a moment? Mr. Hon-o, please calm everyone down. Ah, and Ms. Kamatsuka, I’m sorry but could you also assist?"

"I-I understand. I’ll help Mr. Hon-o."

The principal and Mr. Undo hurriedly left the classroom.

The room was quickly filled with anxious murmurs.

"Everyone, be quiet. It’s fine, there are plenty of other teachers out there. There’s no way anyone’s getting in here."

Mr. Hon-o was trying his best to calm everyone down. No one was panicking or trying to flee, but everyone still looked uneasy.

However, amidst all that, there were two students who weren’t flustered at all.

"I wonder what kind of person would break into a school like this."

"Indeed. I’m a bit curious myself."

The two of them were trying to peek outside from the window. Even though I was feeling a bit shaken, I had to admit their courage was impressive.

That said, I was also a little curious about what kind of person this suspicious individual could be, so I decided to take a quick look outside as well.

At the gate, I could see a man arguing with several teachers.

Just what kind of scary person could he be? I squinted my eyes to get a better look—

"Aaaaah!? N-No way…"

M-My knees gave out...

I collapsed to the floor, leaning against the window.

The man arguing at the gate—

Was Mr. Yamashika.

◆

After that, well, things got pretty wild.

It seemed that the principal was the kind of person who made swift decisions because before I knew it, a police car had shown up.

I rushed to the scene to try and prove that he wasn’t a suspicious person, but it was already too late. The argument had reached a boiling point.

"I’m telling you, I’m not some suspicious guy! I’m a lawyer!"

"Shut up! What kind of lawyer has such a shady look in his eyes!?"

"Don’t judge me based on my eyes! Can’t you see this lawyer’s badge!?"

"Hmph, even my son has a fancier badge than that!"

"Don’t compare a lawyer’s badge to some cheap toy from a candy box!"

"Anyway! You’re coming with us to the station for a bit!"

"Like hell I am! If this is voluntary questioning, I refuse! If you want to take me, bring me a damn arrest warrant!"

M-Mr. Yamashika…

I was on the verge of collapsing again but somehow managed to keep my legs from giving out as I rushed to the scene and desperately pleaded for Mr. Yamashika’s innocence.

In a way, it felt like I had just gained some experience defending an innocent person falsely accused of being a suspect.

Eventually, I managed to calm the situation down, and I, along with Mr. Yamashika and the other teachers, returned to the classroom.

Mr. Yamashika leaned in and whispered to me so no one else could hear.

"Seriously, I came all this way to check up on my student, and this is what I get?"

"I-I’m sorry, sir…"

It’s not like it was my fault, but I apologized anyway.

Well, despite everything, Mr. Yamashika had come to see how I was doing, so I suppose I should be grateful for that.

"So, what’s the situation? You’ve already settled things, right?"

"Um, no, actually…"

This might be my chance to get some advice from him. I explained the situation so far to Mr. Yamashika.

The teachers were still insisting on penalizing the students for breaking the rules. But the students had unavoidable reasons for doing so, and they couldn’t possibly accept the punishment—

"…So that's the situation, Mr. Yamashika. Everyone's really into this trial, but at this rate… well, I feel like there's going to be lingering resentment between the teachers and the students…"

However, it didn't seem like Mr. Yamashika was listening to me at all.

"When you're in a situation like that, you make it seem like the other side is at fault too, and then you muddle things up until it all blows over."

"…Huh? Um, what do you mean by that?"

"Well, you've done well for your first trial. I said I'd cover your ass, didn't I? Just watch what I do from here."

He grinned. Yes, that same devilish grin.

But what did he mean? At this point, is there really still a way to resolve this?

"Everyone, I apologize for all the commotion. The suspicious individual issue has been resolved, so please rest assured."

The principal, having returned to the podium, addressed the class. The students let out sighs of relief.

"Um, Principal, that person over there is…?"

Mr. Hon-o pointed to Mr. Yamashika, who had sat down next to me at the defendant's seat.

"It seems he is a practicing lawyer who is currently mentoring Ms. Kamatsuka."

"That's right. I just wanted to check on my little chick to see how she's doing."

Ugh… I guess I'm still just a chick to him…

Or wait, maybe he's saying I've grown from an egg into a chick and that I've matured?

…No, either way, I shouldn't be satisfied with such a low standard…

"Now then, let's resume the trial, which was interrupted earlier. Defense, please call your next witness."

The next witness. There wasn't anyone left. We had already presented our case.

Naturally, the eyes of everyone on the defense team turned to Mr. Yamashika. He was reading that brochure again for some reason.

"Hey, Satsuki."

"W-What?"

"The water bottle you brought, how big was it?"

"Huh? Oh, it was a thermos that holds about 350 milliliters."

"Were the other kids' bottles about the same?"

"Yeah. At most, some had 500-milliliter plastic bottles."

Mr. Yamashika nodded in understanding and then turned to face the judge.

"Your Honor, I've heard enough about the situation. I'd like to take over from here. I'd also like to call one more witness."

"I see, of course. Who is the witness?"

Mr. Yamashika pointed to the two teachers seated at the plaintiff's table.

"Either one of those two fine individuals over there will do."

At the sudden request, Mr. Undo and Mr. Hon-o exchanged glances.

"I'll go."

Mr. Hon-o stood up and took the witness stand.

"Alright, let's begin the questioning. May I ask your name?"

"My name is… Hon-o."

"Understood. Now then, Mr. Hon-o—"

I focused all my attention on Mr. Yamashika's words. No matter how things had turned out, this was my first chance to witness Mr. Yamashika conduct a cross-examination.

He picked up the brochure he'd been reading earlier.

"You made this brochure, didn't you?"

"Yes, we did."

"I see, I see.

Now then, are you aware that most of the students who participated in the orienteering event only brought water bottles that hold less than 500 milliliters?"

"N-No, I wasn't aware."

"Alright. Are you familiar with how much water is required to stay hydrated when being active for six hours in temperatures exceeding 32 degrees Celsius?"

Mr. Hon-o's eyes darted nervously.

"Uh, um… about 500 milliliters?"

"There's no need for vague answers. I'll ask again. Are you aware of how much water is required to stay hydrated for six hours in extreme heat? If you know, answer yes. If you don't, answer no."

"N-No, I don't know."

"Very well. Now, are you also unaware that when the temperature exceeds 32 degrees, one needs to drink approximately 150 milliliters of water per hour? Therefore, for six hours, at least 800 milliliters would be necessary?"

"Y-Yes."

"Now, regarding this brochure, while it does say to bring a water bottle, it doesn't specify that the bottle should hold more than 800 milliliters, correct?"

"Y-Yes, that's true, but…"

"Then, Mr. Hon-o, couldn't we consider the following? You and your colleagues didn't know how much water was necessary for six hours of activity under the hot sun, and you didn't include that information in the brochure. As a result, the students only brought water bottles that held far less than what was needed, which led to a shortage of water, and they had no choice but to buy juice."

A-amazing… Mr. Hon-o, who had been so confident just a moment ago, was now completely deflated.

"I-I'm not sure if we can generalize it that way…"

"But you didn’t know how much water was necessary for six hours of activity under the hot sun, right?"

"Y-Yes."

"Naturally, you didn’t include that in the brochure, and you couldn’t explain it to the students either, right?"

"Well, I suppose you could say that…"

"So, it’s only natural that the students brought water bottles that held around 500 milliliters. But that’s far from enough. Buying juice to quench their thirst was unavoidable. Don’t you think?"

Mr. Hon-o hung his head in defeat.

"…Indeed, that may very well be the case."

"Exactly. In other words, you teachers had a responsibility to inform the students of what size water bottle they should bring. Yet, you ignored that responsibility and only blamed the students for breaking the rules. I don’t think anyone could accept that, could they?"

The two teachers from the plaintiff’s side were left speechless. Everyone in the room was staring at Mr. Yamashika in astonishment.

Mr. Yamashika turned toward the judge.

"Your Honor. As a lawyer, I would like to make a proposal. It’s true that the students broke the agreed-upon rules, and it’s only natural that they be held accountable for that. However, the brochure created by the teachers clearly contains a significant oversight, and it’s also clear that this oversight contributed to the incident in question.

Therefore, the defense proposes the following: It’s understandable that the students who broke the rules should be punished by running five laps around the field. However, if the teachers still insist on enforcing this punishment, then the teachers, who were also at fault, should run the five laps together with the students."

"…That seems like a reasonable proposal."

The judge nodded gravely.

And just like that, Mr. Yamashika had pointed out an issue I hadn’t even considered and swiftly got the teachers to acknowledge their responsibility.

Moreover, this compromise. It wasn't exactly "settling the matter by punishing both sides equally," but with this, both the teachers and the students would be able to accept the outcome. This must have been what he meant by "making it look like the other side is at fault, and then muddling things up."

"Does the defense have any objections?"

Satsuki and Urihata exchanged glances, then nodded in satisfaction.

"Yeah. I guess that seems fair."

"Indeed. It's a reasonable compromise."

"Is the plaintiff's side also in agreement?"

Mr. Undo, after seeing Mr. Hon-o nod in resignation, sighed deeply before speaking.

"We have no choice. The lawyer is right. We'll run together with the students."

"Very well. It seems both sides are in agreement. Let's bring this trial to a close."

In the next moment, smiles of satisfaction spread across the faces of every student in the classroom.

And so, the small, very small trial that I had experienced for the first time in my life came to an end.

It was truly a minor incident. But it gave me a wealth of experience.

As we left the classroom, everyone saw us off with bright smiles. They were surely happy that their arguments had been recognized.

In the end, I didn't do much of anything. All the credit belongs to Mr. Yamashika. But at the end of the road I'm on, there's him. If I work hard enough, maybe someday, like Mr. Yamashika did today, I'll be able to protect the rights of those in weaker positions and earn their gratitude.

Yes, everything lies at the end of this path. And now, I have the feet to walk that path.

Mom, I'm proud that I chose the path to becoming a lawyer.

◆

…But.

The following Monday.

"Hey, Isshaku-hassun. Go buy me a newspaper and some lunch."

"Oh, and get mine too. I’m broke, so put it on my tab."

"Ugh…"

This grueling treatment would continue for another two and a half months.

はじめてのさいばん
れぼりゅーしょんず

My First Trial: Revolutions

"The court is now in session, presided over by Judge Shudo Kenta. All rise!"

At the bailiff's command, everyone in the courtroom, including us, stood up simultaneously.

Shortly afterward, an elderly man entered the courtroom. At first glance, he seemed like a kindly old gentleman. But this man was, in fact, the judge presiding over today's hearing.

Once the judge took his seat, the bailiff called out, "Be seated!" and we all sat down.

"We will now begin the preliminary hearing regarding the theft charges against the defendant, Masakazu Yamashita."

At the mention of his name, the defendant seated to my left—Mr. Yamashita—visibly flinched.

"Mr. Yamashita, it's okay. Your innocence will be proven here."

I said this to reassure him.

"Y-Yes, please…"

Mr. Yamashita nodded, speaking in a slightly accented tone.

Masakazu Yamashita. He's about to turn 21. Average height for his age, with a slightly skinny build. If I had to describe his appearance in one word, it would be "simple."

He's someone who recently came to the city seeking work. Yet, for some reason, he's been wrongfully accused of theft, an unfortunate man indeed.

"Prosecutor Naruse, are you ready to proceed?"

The judge looked toward the prosecution's table.

"Yes, we are ready."

The prosecutor, addressed as Naruse, stood up slightly and answered. He was a young prosecutor. Wearing a broad tie, his appearance was more reminiscent of a young office worker than a prosecutor.

"And is the defense prepared?"

When the judge turned toward me, I hurriedly stood up.

"Y-Yes, uh, we're ready."

I was pretty nervous, but I tried my best to put on a brave front so as not to worry Mr. Yamashita. …Though I feel like I might've come off a bit awkward.

"Very well. The prosecution may call its first witness."

◆

My name is Shinogi Kamatsuka. I'm currently a law apprentice—in other words, a lawyer-in-training.

Right now, I'm in the middle of what's called a "defense apprenticeship," where I gain hands-on experience working under a practicing lawyer. Just recently, I knocked on the door of the Yamashika Law Office, run by the renowned lawyer Zenko Yamashika, whom I had long admired. I was fortunate enough to be accepted as his apprentice, and ever since, I've been receiving rigorous daily training from the highly skilled lawyer, Mr. Yamashika, on what it means to be a lawyer.

…Or at least, that's how it was supposed to be.

Unfortunately, Mr. Yamashika turned out to be a lawyer completely different from what I had imagined. He's stubborn and arrogant by nature. He openly admits that he takes on the cases of unfortunate people purely for his own amusement. If a complicated murder case comes his way, he'll actually be thrilled. Quite the heartless person.

Because of this, he hasn't let me gain any experience as a lawyer at all. On the contrary, he's been assigning me chores, claiming it's "work necessary to keep the office running."

"When I was an apprentice, all I did was chat all day. Just take it easy."

That's what Mr. Yamashika says, but I'd really prefer it if he didn't follow such bad examples.

Just to clarify, despite being like this, Mr. Yamashika is so famous that there's hardly anyone who doesn't know him as an undefeated lawyer in the courtroom. That's why I chose to study under him, hoping to witness his skills firsthand. But…

To my dismay, my daily routine showed no signs of changing, no matter how much time passed. All I did was cleaning and running errands—or rather, being the office gofer.

At this rate, my valuable defense apprenticeship would end up being nothing but cleaning duties. I started to worry about this just a few days ago. So, I decided to take a gamble and make a desperate request to him: "Please, let me see you in action in court."

As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Zenko Yamashika is a man with a rather twisted personality. On top of that, he avoids doing anything troublesome himself and tries to pass it off to others. I didn't think he'd actually listen to my request, but… as it turns out, I asked at just the right time. Apparently, he'd been pressured by the local bar association to "take on a court-appointed case once in a while," and so he ended up taking on this theft case.

By the way, a court-appointed lawyer is one provided by the government free of charge. In this country, it's a rule that whenever a criminal trial is held, a defense attorney must be assigned to protect the defendant's rights. However, some people aren't able to afford a lawyer due to financial circumstances. That's where the government steps in and provides one for free. This task often falls to younger lawyers like Mr. Yamashika, but it seems he's notorious for skipping out on it.

Anyway, whatever the circumstances, I finally had the chance to see the famous Mr. Yamashika's courtroom skills with my own eyes, and my heart was racing with excitement.

But then…

When it came time to actually take on the defense for this case, Mr. Yamashika dropped a bombshell on me.

"I'm not doing anything for this trial. This is part of your practical training, so you handle everything."

"Eeeeeeeeh!?"

That's what he said. He's entrusting—no, forcing me, a complete novice, to handle an entire trial.

Of course, I protested. I told him that I was still woefully unprepared to protect the defendant's rights.

…But.

"If it comes down to it, I'll back you up. Just do it however you see fit."

That was his response. He didn't even bother to meet my eyes, casually reading the newspaper in a tone that clearly showed he wasn't interested at all…

I had a vague feeling all along, but it seemed I had no right to refuse.

◆

And that’s how I ended up sitting here at the defense table, acting as the defense attorney responsible for protecting the defendant.

Let me briefly explain something. There’s a slight difference between a lawyer and a defense attorney. Simply put, a lawyer is someone who holds the qualifications defined by the Lawyers Act and is registered in the lawyers’ directory. A defense attorney, on the other hand, is simply someone who takes on the role of defending another person. In other words, while you need qualifications to become a lawyer, anyone can technically be a defense attorney.

However, in a criminal trial, where the outcome could have life-altering consequences for the defendant, the defense attorney must be a qualified lawyer to ensure the defendant’s rights are properly protected. This is only natural. After all, a layperson who knows nothing about the law couldn’t possibly defend a defendant’s rights effectively. And of course, as a law apprentice, I don’t meet that requirement.

However, there’s an exception to this rule. According to Article 31, Paragraph 2 of the Japanese Code of Criminal Procedure, if the trial is being held in a district court, and with the court’s approval, as well as the presence of a qualified lawyer—in this case, Mr. Yamashika—I can be recognized as a provisional defense attorney, even though I don’t meet the usual requirements.

To my surprise, the court granted me permission to act as the defense attorney without much hesitation. I’m sure this is largely thanks to the fact that, despite his attitude, Mr. Yamashika is still a well-known, undefeated lawyer.

So, as fate would have it, I ended up taking on the defense in this case, even though it wasn’t my original intention. That said, the trial about to begin isn’t a full-blown trial but rather a preliminary hearing, a relatively new procedure that was introduced a few years ago.

Unlike a regular public trial, there’s none of the complicated stuff like opening statements or plea declarations. The prosecution simply has to present evidence that gives the five jurors reason to suspect the defendant committed the crime. …To put it bluntly, it's a simplified version of a regular trial. If we can convince the jury that the defendant is innocent, we win.

The five jurors are seated to the right of the judge. They’re all just ordinary people chosen randomly from the general public, and they’re all watching the trial with tense expressions.

"Now, as the prosecution’s first witness, we call Officer Suzuki, who was the first to arrive at the scene," Prosecutor Naruse declared as he stood up.

Hmm, his voice lacked energy, and his movements seemed sluggish. I couldn’t help but feel that such an attitude wasn’t appropriate for a trial that could determine the course of someone’s life.

"Doesn’t that Naruse prosecutor seem kind of unmotivated?" I asked Mr. Yamashika, who was seated to my right.

"Well, it’s just a minor case, so it’s to be expected. Prosecutors like him don’t get serious unless it’s a big case, like a murder trial," Mr. Yamashika said, completely detached from the situation.

Ever heard of the saying, “Learn from others’ mistakes”? I’m sure Prosecutor Naruse wouldn’t want to hear that from someone like him. After all, Mr. Yamashika was sitting there with his legs crossed, slouched in his chair, and not even bothering to hide his big yawns.

While I was thinking about that, a uniformed policeman stepped up to the witness stand.

"State your name and occupation," the judge said.

"Taro Suzuki, police officer."

Taro Suzuki… Now that’s quite a name. I’d really like to meet his parents. Poor guy, if he had been born in my hometown, he’d have been given a more unique name…

"Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in accordance with your conscience?"

"Yes, I swear."

The judge nodded and said, "Very well," allowing Prosecutor Naruse to begin his questioning. Naruse turned to face the witness.

"Now then, Officer Suzuki, on July 20th, last month, you were on duty at your police box, correct?"

"Yes."

"And around 2 PM that day, you were ordered to go to Midorioka Central Park, correct?"

"Yes, that’s right."

"First, can you explain what kind of place Midorioka Central Park is?"

"It’s a very large park located in the center of the city. It’s famous for having many sculptures created by amateur artisans, and it’s one of the major tourist attractions in the area."

"What kind of orders did you receive?"

"Yes. I was told that a shoplifting incident had occurred at Midorioka Central Park, and that the suspect had already been apprehended by citizens. My job was to investigate the details and take custody of the suspect."

"And so, you went to the park?"

"Yes."

"What time did you arrive at the park?"

"Around 2:15 PM. I went there by patrol car."

"Could you describe the scene at the park when you arrived?"

"Yes. Um, since it was a holiday, a flea market was being held in the park, and there were a lot of people there.

In one corner of the park, a crowd had gathered, and the suspect—I mean, the defendant—was being restrained by several citizens."

"You spoke to the people restraining the defendant, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"What did they tell you?"

"I object! That's a leading question calling for hearsay!"

Right, you're not supposed to ask about things people heard second-hand. Almost unconsciously, I had shouted my very first objection.

However, while this was a critical objection for me, to Prosecutor Naruse, it probably just seemed like an annoying waste of time.

"Your Honor," he said in a tone that clearly conveyed he was fed up. "This is a preliminary hearing, and this is just a question to move the process along. I don't think we need to be so particular about the details at this stage."

"Hmm, what do you think, defense counsel?" the judge asked.

"Uh—" I couldn't think of a response.

I hadn't expected him to counter like that. It's true that this is a preliminary hearing, and I can sort of understand what Naruse was getting at…

Ugh, in times of trouble, I have no choice but to rely on the one person who said, "If it comes down to it, I'll back you up." I glanced over at Mr. Yamashika for help. …And immediately sank into despair.

He was just sitting there with his chin in his hand, staring off into space. It was obvious he had no intention of offering any advice, and I wasn't even sure if he had been paying attention to the conversation up until now.

"Defense counsel, what's your response?" the judge prompted.

Ugh… I couldn't stall any longer. I slammed my hand on the desk and said,

"Even so, rules are rules! That question is inappropriate at this stage!"

Prosecutor Naruse let out an exaggerated sigh and said,

"Very well. I'll save that for another witness. No further questions."

Ugh, am I imagining things, or are the jurors giving me looks that say, "Just let us go home already"? It's like I'm the bad guy dragging out the proceedings…

And then, it happened.

"There's always one of those guys who thinks all they have to do is shout 'objection' without thinking," said a voice from my right.

There was no need to check who it was... It was the same person I had once respected from the bottom of my heart.

"Defense counsel, do you have any cross-examination?" the judge asked, snapping me back to reality.

"Uh… oh, yes, cross-examination!? Um, let's see…"

I was completely flustered, having been asked this without any time to gather my thoughts.

"Mr. Yamashika, what should I do…?"

"How many times do I have to tell you? This trial is yours to handle. Just do whatever you want," he said.

"Uugh…"

Such a cold response…

If he were saying this to give me experience or because he trusted me, I could accept it. But unfortunately, I wasn't naive enough to think that way anymore. After spending the past month under Mr. Yamashika, I'd grown a bit cynical, and I'd learned a thing or two about how the world works. The reason Mr. Yamashika was making me do everything… well, it was obvious. He just didn't want to deal with the hassle.

I turned back to the judge and reluctantly said,

"No, I have no questions for cross-examination."

"…Alright."

Would Mr. Yamashika really step in to help if I made a mistake? If I failed to protect the defendant's rights, it wouldn't be me who was held responsible, but Mr. Yamashika, who was here in a supervisory capacity—at least, that's how it should work.

But given that this was the same man who'd been yawning throughout the trial, I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to dodge responsibility by claiming, "I wasn't in my right mind during the trial."

"The next witness is the victim of this case, Kohei Tsukada."

The man who stepped up to the witness stand was a middle-aged man. He was wearing a suit, probably because it was a trial, but he gave off the impression of an ordinary father of two.

After Mr. Tsukada finished swearing in, Prosecutor Naruse began his questioning.

"Were you in Midorioka Central Park around 2 PM on July 20th?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing at that time?"

"That day, there was a flea market being held at Midorioka Central Park, and I was participating. I was selling some things I no longer needed from home. Around 2 PM, I was watching over my stall."

"And that's when the incident occurred, correct?"

"Yes."

"Could you please testify about the details of the incident?"

"Yes. I was chatting with a customer who had come to look at my goods when I suddenly noticed that one of the items that had been on display was missing."

"What kind of item was it that went missing?"

"It was a ceramic ashtray. It was a gift from my father, a replica of a famous piece of art, and it was worth a fair amount."

"This ashtray in question, is it this one?"

Prosecutor Naruse took out a ceramic dish wrapped in a plastic bag.

It looked to be about twenty centimeters in diameter. At a glance, it was clearly ceramic, with blue patterns painted on it. It did look somewhat like an ashtray, though the bottom seemed a bit too deep for that.

"Yes, that's definitely the ashtray."

As Mr. Tsukada nodded, Prosecutor Naruse turned to the judge.

"Your Honor, the prosecution would like to submit this ashtray as Prosecution Exhibit A."

"Does the defense have any objections?"

Of course not.

"No, none at all."

"Very well, it is accepted as evidence."

Prosecutor Naruse handed the ashtray to the court clerk and then turned back to the witness.

"How much were you selling the ashtray for?"

"150 dollars. It was the most expensive item I had for sale that day."

"I see. So, such a valuable item had gone missing. What happened after that?"

"I instinctively shouted, 'Thief! Someone stole one of my items!' and I looked around to see if there were any suspicious people nearby. That's when a woman running another stall said, 'It's him,' and pointed at someone."

"And who was that person?"

"It was him."

Mr. Tsukada pointed directly at—as expected—the defendant, Mr. Yamashita.

Prosecutor Naruse nodded with satisfaction and said, "That's all. You may begin your cross-examination."

Ugh, cross-examination… The testimony just now seemed to consist only of basic facts. How am I supposed to cross-examine that? And Mr. Yamashika is still sitting there, resting his chin on his hand, looking completely out of it…

I stood up and hesitantly spoke.

"N-No cross-examination."

"…I see. Very well."

It's okay, I'm sure my chance will come… eventually… I think…

"The next witness is Ms. Keiko Yoshimura, who identified the defendant with 'it's him' during Mr. Tsukada's testimony."

The witness who took the stand was a woman in her forties. A while ago, the word "harridan" was all the rage, and if that term weren't outdated now, it would definitely suit this woman.

…Wait, am I being a bit too harsh? I'd like to think it's because of Mr. Yamashika's influence.

"Ms. Yoshimura, on the day of the incident, you pointed out the defendant, identifying him as the person who stole the ashtray from Mr. Tsukada's stall, correct?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why were you so sure it was him?"

Ms. Yoshimura, with a bit of pride, replied, "I was also participating in the flea market that day, and there was someone among the customers in the park who was acting very suspiciously."

"Are you referring to the defendant?"

"Yes, that’s right. I work part-time at a bookstore, as you may know. Lately, shoplifting by young people has been on the rise at places like mine. I’ve caught quite a few of those shoplifters myself, so I’m pretty familiar with the typical behavior of a thief."

"I see. Could you please explain in detail what kind of behavior the defendant was displaying at the time?"

"Sure. It was definitely suspicious. He was carrying a shoulder bag that made it easy to take things in and out, and he was wandering aimlessly around the park, going from one stall to another. Sometimes he’d pick up items with interest, but he never actually bought anything."

"So, in other words, he seemed to be looking for something to steal?"

"Objection!" I stood up, raising my hand. "That’s a leading question!"

"Objection sustained."

Y-Yes~! My first proper objection was sustained. It was a spur-of-the-moment action, but I felt a small sense of accomplishment.

"...?"

But then I realized something. As I glanced around the courtroom, I noticed that I was the only one celebrating this. Of course, Mr. Yamashika and Prosecutor Naruse hadn’t even batted an eye. Ugh, it really wasn’t that big of an objection, was it…

"Let me rephrase the question. The defendant was behaving in a suspicious, restless manner, looking around, correct?"

"Yes, that’s right."

"And since you already had your suspicions about the defendant, you continued to observe his actions closely?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Could you please tell us what happened next?"

Ms. Yoshimura turned toward Mr. Yamashita, who was sitting beside me in the defendant’s seat, and said,

"I was watching carefully, and I saw him stop by Mr. Tsukada’s stall. Then, just after he left, I heard Mr. Tsukada shout, ‘Thief!’ So, I was sure it was him and shouted, ‘It’s him!’ Then a passerby helped restrain him."

"Thank you. No further questions."

"Defense, your cross-examination?"

Prompted by the judge, I stood up from my seat.

Hmm, with this testimony, even I feel like I could do some cross-examination.

From what I've heard, this woman has no solid evidence that Mr. Yamashita actually stole the item. She's only judging him based on his behavior. I could definitely press her on that point and throw her off balance.

But there's one problem. If this was all the testimony they had, the prosecution wouldn't have indicted Mr. Yamashita in the first place. According to what Mr. Yamashita told me, there's another key piece of testimony that clearly implicates him as the one who stole the ashtray.

That testimony is probably coming up next. If that's the case, even if I manage to shake this witness and make a good impression on the jury now, it could easily be overturned later.

Hmm, it's frustrating, but I'll hold off for now. It's okay, I can always cross-examine later.

"No cross-examination."

"…I see. Prosecution, please call your next witness."

This is now the third witness in a row I haven't cross-examined. Even the judge is starting to look at me with suspicion. And it's not just the judge. The jurors and even Mr. Yamashita are giving me looks that say, "Does this defense attorney even care?" Ugh, I'll definitely do something later, I swear… but please, just bear with me for now…

"The next witness is Mr. Kuwabara, who restrained the defendant."

The man who took the stand was a somewhat heavyset, middle-aged man.

"Please state your name and occupation."

"Keisuke Kuwabara. I'm... self-employed."

Ah, I see. Self-employed means he's his own boss, in other words, a company president. Now that he mentions it, his slightly thick waistline does give off a bit of a "president" vibe.

…No, no, as a lawyer, I shouldn’t be having such biased thoughts. Ugh, it’s all Mr. Yamashika’s fault.

"Mr. Kuwabara, you were the one who restrained the defendant, correct?"

"Yes, that’s right."

"Now, please testify in detail about the events."

"That day, I was also looking around the flea market as a customer. But suddenly, I heard someone shout, 'Thief!' and then, 'It’s him!' When I quickly turned toward the voice, I saw that the woman who just testified was pointing at someone who was standing right next to me."

"And who was the person standing next to you?"

"It was him."

Again, he pointed at the defendant, Mr. Yamashita.

"What happened after that?"

"Perhaps because he realized he had been pointed out, he became terribly flustered. Then, to make matters worse, he suddenly tried to run away, so I hurriedly jumped on him and restrained him."

…If a burly man like this jumped on him, there’s no way a slender guy like Yamashita could have gotten away.

"I see. And what happened next?"

"He denied it, saying, 'I didn’t do anything,' but then Ms. Yoshimura, who just testified… yes, she checked his shoulder bag, and a bowl came out. When Mr. Tsukada, who had his goods stolen, checked the bowl—no, the ashtray—he confirmed that it was indeed the item that had been stolen. So, we called the police and handed him over."

At last, it came out. This is the biggest issue.

Mr. Yamashita had denied having any knowledge of it, but the fact that the stolen item had appeared from his bag right in front of so many witnesses—this was the key factor that solidified the suspicion against him. And at this moment, I still had no way to refute why something like this had happened…

"That’s all. Thank you for your time today. Defense, please proceed with the cross-examination."

Prosecutor Naruse gave a slight bow to Mr. Kuwabara before addressing me.

This was probably the last of the prosecution's witnesses. In other words, this was my final chance to cross-examine.

I knew I should do something… but. My mind had gone completely blank.

If it had been the testimony of that middle-aged woman, I might've had something, but what exactly was I supposed to ask someone who had merely caught Mr. Yamashita?

I had no idea.

As pathetic as it sounds, I had to admit it—I wasn't cut out for this trial. But just admitting that I couldn't handle it would mean betraying the trust Mr. Yamashita had placed in me. And that, at least, I had to prevent at all costs.

I desperately tried to think. What could I do in this situation to help Mr. Yamashita?

The answer was clear from the start. I couldn't turn this situation around, but there was someone here who could. That's right, my only choice was to somehow get the unmotivated Mr. Yamashika to step up and take over the defense properly.

"I-I don't have any cross-examination at this time."

I stood up and said that, for now.

"I see. Prosecution, your next witness, please."

"No, Your Honor. With the testimony of the current witness, the prosecution has concluded its witness presentations. I believe the jury has understood that there is sufficient reason to suspect the defendant of theft."

Prosecutor Naruse's tone was calm and matter-of-fact, as if he were simply resolving a trivial case.

"I see. Very well. We will now move to the defense's case." The judge turned to me and said, "Defense, are you ready?"

Of course, I wasn't ready. But naturally, there was no way I could say that.

"O-Of course, Your Honor.

However, um, Your Honor, the trial has been going on for quite some time now, so if possible, I'd appreciate it if we could take a short break…"

I mumbled that a bit awkwardly.

The judge glanced at the wall clock in the corner of the courtroom and then nodded as if he understood.

"I see. That seems reasonable. Let's take a ten-minute recess. Is that acceptable?"

"Y-Yes, that's fine."

"Good. This court will now enter a ten-minute recess."

With the judge's declaration, the courtroom suddenly began to stir.

As soon as the recess began, I sprang into action.

First, I turned to Mr. Yamashita, who was sitting to my left.

"Mr. Yamashita! Don't worry, we will definitely prove your innocence! The trial is far from over!"

I rattled off my words in one breath. "Uh… right…" Mr. Yamashita replied, sounding a bit resigned. I left him for the moment and grabbed Mr. Yamashika's arm next.

"Mr. Yamashika! I really need to discuss our defense strategy moving forward! Please come with me to the waiting room!"

There was no way I could say in front of Mr. Yamashita, "I can't handle this anymore! Please take over!" That would be too shameful.

But, as always, Mr. Yamashika looked sleepy and disinterested.

"Ah? How many times do I have to tell you? I left this trial to you. I don't care about the defense strategy or whatever, just handle it however you want…"

"Please, I'm begging you! I need your help!"

"Tch… fine, fine, just don't pull on my arm."

Ignoring his protests, I dragged him out of the courtroom.

◆

I pulled Mr. Yamashika back to the defense's waiting room. The soundproofing here was good, so no matter how loudly I spoke, no one would hear.

I bowed my head at a 30-degree angle and pleaded desperately.

"Please, Mr. Yamashika! I just can't handle Mr. Yamashita's defense! Please, you need to take over the rest of the trial! I'm begging you!"

His first response to my plea was:

"…Huh?"

That was it.

"Come on, what are you saying at this point? You've been handling the trial just fine so far. Don't worry, you'll manage."

I almost despaired on the spot.

This guy absolutely doesn't care… I haven't even done a single cross-examination…

"But, but! I don't know what to do anymore! If Mr. Yamashita ends up being found guilty, I won't be able to face him, and besides, you're the lead defense attorney! It would damage your record as the undefeated courtroom champion if you lost this case!"

"Look, the punishment for theft isn't that big of a deal. He'll get a criminal record, sure, but it's not going to affect our lives. As for losing a case? Well, that's not exactly fun, but I've never aimed to win every court-appointed case, you know. Win or lose, it doesn't matter to you. So just try your best and do what you can."

"T-That's…!"

I was honestly a bit offended by that.

"How can you say that?! Don't you believe in Mr. Yamashita's innocence?!"

"…Who knows? The guy came to the city looking for work, right? That means he was probably strapped for cash. He was seen acting suspiciously in the park, and most importantly, the stolen item came out of his bag, didn't it? If you ask me, it's hard to believe he's innocent."

"T-That's…"

With a calm expression, Mr. Yamashika had just voiced all the doubts that were probably swirling in the jurors' minds right now.

"What about you? With all this evidence stacked against him, isn't there a part of you that's starting to doubt this Yamashita guy?"

"N-No! I believe in Mr. Yamashita's innocence!"

That's right. I believe in Mr. Yamashita's innocence.

Mr. Yamashita had come to this city from the countryside in search of work. It's true that he might have been struggling financially, but I don't believe that would immediately lead him to commit a crime. Seeing the number of people in a city park, something unimaginable in the countryside, it's only natural for someone like him to feel confused. Interpreting that as a precursor to shoplifting is just too cruel. As someone who also came from the countryside, I understand this well. If someone suddenly accused me of being a thief in such a situation, there's no way I'd be able to stay calm. I can completely understand the urge to run away in panic.

"…Hmph, I see. Just a difference in opinion, then. In that case, I've got nothing more to say. It's up to you, who believes in your client's innocence, to handle it appropriately."

Mr. Yamashika said, stifling a yawn.

That's right. To him, whether someone is innocent or not is secondary. What's important to him is winning the case and securing a not-guilty verdict. Even an innocent person can be found guilty, and even someone who committed a crime can be acquitted. Yes, everything depends on the defense attorney.

Ugh, why did I ever respect this man? Thinking about it makes me feel like I'm on the verge of hating myself.

But.

But even so, to break through the current situation, to get Mr. Yamashita acquitted, I had no choice but to rely on this man's knowledge and experience.

"B-But, Mr. Yamashika! I have no idea how to secure a not-guilty verdict anymore! You've heard the testimonies so far, haven't you? Sure, there are some points that can be questioned, but none of the witnesses seem like the kind of people who would lie—"

The moment I said that.

"You've been coming to my office for a whole month and you're still saying such naïve things? That's why you can't come up with any decent solutions!"

Ugh… Now, suddenly, Mr. Yamashika was yelling at me.

"Tch, I thought you had some potential, but that naïve personality of yours is hopeless. That's why you can't do a proper defense."

"If I could, I'd hand you over to an acquaintance in Kabukicho to toughen you up… but we don't have time. Fine, looks like we'll have to do some shock therapy."

"Eh—?"

Suddenly, Mr. Yamashika glared at me sharply from directly in front.

I gasped. What a cold, terrifying look. Just being stared at made me feel like I had done something wrong and that it had been found out.

Like a frog being stared down by a snake, I felt my entire body freeze up.

"Listen, remember the obvious first. If your client is innocent, then there must be a real culprit out there somewhere, right?

What proof do we have that one of the witnesses isn't the real culprit? Listen up, witnesses are all liars, frauds, and scoundrels who try to pin crimes on others! I'll say it as many times as it takes! Every witness we deal with is a liar, a fraud, a contrarian, an ill-tempered, stubborn braggart!"

Mr. Yamashika grabbed my shoulders and shook me.

"Say it with me! Every witness is a liar, a fraud, and a scoundrel! Come on, say it!"

"A-ahh…"

With his snake-like eyes glaring at me and shaking my shoulders, I found myself forced to utter the words.

"E-Every witness is…"

"That's right! A liar, a fraud, and a scoundrel!"

"A-a liar, a fraud, and a scoundrel…"

"That's it! Every person but yourself is a liar! Don't trust anyone! The concept of human goodness is a lie! Come on, shout it! I'm ordering you! Say it! Shout it! Every person but yourself is a liar! A liar! A liar!!"

If I had to describe my emotional state at that moment in one word—it would be desperation.

By the time I realized it, I was shouting.

"Ughh, every person but myself is a liar! A liar! A liar~!!"

I think I was almost crying by the end.

"That's it, you understand now! We're up against a bunch of liars! If you truly care about your client, don't treat these liars like humans and don't deal with them properly! Deceive, trick, mislead, and fool them! Now, repeat after me!"

"I'll deceive, trick, mislead, and fool them!"

I just kept repeating his words, which echoed like a curse.

"Listen, justice doesn't exist in this world! If it does, it's only in the hands of the lawyer who wins in court! The winning lawyer is justice, is God, is truth! A losing lawyer is nothing but trash spewing carbon dioxide! An algae that does photosynthesis is more useful! If you truly care about your client, don't hesitate to use any means necessary! Create justice, create truth! Bluff, lie, and deceive! I'll say it again, the winning lawyer is justice! For that, you must mislead, trick, and fabricate!"

"I-I'll mislead, trick, and fabricate!"

"That's right, witnesses are liars, villains, and frauds!!"

"L-Liars, villains, and frauds!!"

"That's the spirit! There's no need to hold back against these lying villains! Use every method at your disposal and relentlessly hound them! Don't give them a moment's rest, don't let them think, don't even let them breathe!"

"Y-Yes!!"

At that moment, I distinctly heard it.

In my head, something went *crack*.

"Feeling a bit better?"

係ります
騙
かりま
こぎ
に
自分以外の
人間は
すべて嘘つきで

I had no idea how much time had passed since we entered the room. By the time I could no longer tell, Mr. Yamashika suddenly spoke.

"Y-Yes. Somehow…"

I answered, panting heavily.

I don’t know why, but I felt completely exhausted.

But there was no more hesitation. If I had to describe my current state of mind, just one word would suffice: "zen"—a calm, clear mind with no disturbances.

That’s right. My client, Mr. Yamashita, despite being innocent, was being treated like a criminal, and his life was on the brink of being ruined. This kind of thing cannot be allowed! So, there’s only one thing I must do—unmask the true culprit, who’s trying to pin the blame on someone else. For that, there’s no need to hold back! I’ll use any means necessary to prove Mr. Yamashita’s innocence—this is my mission!!

Suddenly—Mr. Yamashika glanced at my determined face and smirked.

"Looks like you’ve finally got the right face. In that case, let me give you a little present, as a token for my unworthy disciple."

"A present…?"

Mr. Yamashika took a piece of paper from the inside pocket of his suit and handed it to me.

"I had someone look into the witnesses who might appear in this trial. There’s not much useful information written on it, so I was going to ignore it, but…"

I glanced down at the paper. It listed the personal information of the witnesses we’ve seen so far—their addresses, ages, occupations, family structures—just basic personal details. There didn’t seem to be anything related to the case… or so it seemed…!?

Suddenly, Mr. Yamashika smirked.

"Well, it’s all about how you use it."

◆

"We will now resume the trial," the judge said.

"Defense counsel, please call your first witness."

"Yes."

I slowly stood up.

"First, I'd like to call Officer Taro Suzuki, who took the defendant into custody from the civilian."

Soon, Officer Suzuki took the witness stand.

"The witness has already been sworn in. You may proceed with questioning."

At the judge's words, I fixed my gaze on the witness and threw out my first question.

"You were handed the defendant by a civilian, correct?"

"Yes."

"And you arrested him on the spot?"

"Well, to be precise, it was an ordinary citizen who arrested the defendant. I just took him into custody. Oh, in cases of a crime in progress, even ordinary citizens can make an arrest."

"What was the defendant's demeanor when you took him into custody?"

"What do you mean by his demeanor?"

"His attitude. Did he quietly comply with your requests? Did he willingly offer anything to verify his identity?"

"Yes, well, he was quite calm. He immediately showed his driver's license as well."

"Ordinarily, in cases of shoplifting, even when a suspect is arrested, once their identity is confirmed and they've been questioned, they're usually allowed to return home promptly, right?"

"Yes, well, that's generally the case."

"However, in this particular incident, even though the defendant revealed his identity, he was held in custody for several days, wasn't he?"

"Y-Yes, that's what I heard."

"And why was that?"

"Because he wouldn’t admit to his crime at all. Also, the victim demanded severe punishment, so there was a need to investigate the case thoroughly and determine his guilt, which required an extended period of questioning."

"In other words, had the defendant admitted to the crime, he wouldn’t have been held in custody for so long, correct?"

"W-Well, yes, under the current system, that’s indeed what would’ve happened..."

I banged my hand on the desk. …It hurt.

"What is that all about!? First, you accuse someone of a crime without grounds, and then you say if they admit to it, they’ll be released, but if they deny it, they’ll be detained!? What kind of system is that!?"

"W-Well, that’s just how the current system in Japan works... There isn't much I can do..."

"I see. I understand now. By the way, how many days was the defendant detained?"

"W-Well, it was twenty days."

"Twenty days!?"

That’s the maximum period of detention allowed by law.

Of course, I was well aware of the system this officer was talking about. Because of this system, in cases like false accusations of molestation, for example, the accused faces a dilemma: admit guilt and lose their societal credibility, or deny it and be detained for an extended period, potentially losing their job and suffering other disadvantages.

I could feel my anger steadily rising.

"Officer Suzuki, during those twenty days of detention, the defendant never once admitted to his crime, did he?"

"Y-Yes, that’s correct. That’s why we had no choice but to detain him for twenty days..."

"In other words, had the defendant admitted to his crime during that detention period, he would have been released, correct? Although it would leave him with a criminal record."

"Y-Yes. Well, that’s right."

"So, even though the defendant was subjected to the physical and mental pain of being detained for an extended period, he persisted in asserting his innocence until the very end, didn't he?"

At that moment, the jurors began to show faint expressions of surprise.

"J-Just a moment, please!" Prosecutor Naruse stood up, half-rising from his seat. "I must object to this line of questioning—"

I banged my hand on the desk again, ignoring the pain, and interrupted his nonsense.

"Be quiet, Prosecutor Naruse! You were the one overseeing this case from the start, weren't you? If you hadn't dragged out the investigation so long, the defendant wouldn't have been detained for twenty days!"

"W-What—!?"

"N-Now, now, please calm down, defense counsel," the judge interjected, stepping in.

"I understand what you're trying to say... But this is a place for debate, not personal attacks. Could you please be a bit more careful with your words?"

"Understood. That concludes my questioning. Prosecutor Naruse, please proceed with your cross-examination!"

Prosecutor Naruse stood up, his face barely concealing his anger.

"…No questions."

"The next witness is Ms. Keiko Yoshimura!"

The witness is a liar, a villain, and a fraud. Mr. Yamashika's words now made perfect sense. I had nothing to fear anymore.

As soon as the elderly woman stepped up to the witness stand, I immediately launched into my questioning.

"You said you were watching the defendant in the park the entire time, correct?"

"Yes, that's right."

"And when Mr. Tsukada, the victim, shouted 'Thief!', you pointed out the defendant as the culprit based on his behavior up until that point, correct?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Now, there's one thing I can't help but wonder. Did you actually see the defendant steal the ashtray?"

"…N-No, I didn't. But right after he went near the ashtray, it disappeared. Anyone would think he was the culprit—"

I slammed my hand on the desk again, cutting off her testimony. …My hand still hurt.

"Let me ask you again! Please answer with a simple yes or no! Did you actually see the defendant steal the ashtray with your own eyes?"

Ms. Yoshimura immediately began to stammer.

"W-Well... no. I didn't see him."

"See, just as I thought.

In other words, Ms. Yoshimura, you have no actual evidence to prove that the defendant is the culprit. You simply accused him of being the thief because he was wandering around, didn't you? As a word of advice from someone who's younger yet more knowledgeable, if the defendant is found innocent, you might be held liable for defamation in a civil suit. Forgive me for asking, but does your household have the means to hire a lawyer?"

"O-Objection!"

Prosecutor Naruse stood up, clearly flustered.

"T-The defense is clearly threatening the witness!"

But I wasn't fazed by such a trivial objection.

"I will comply with the prosecution's objection and withdraw the previous question."

I shrugged lightly as I said this and then turned back to face Ms. Yoshimura.

"However, Ms. Yoshimura, I'm not trying to threaten you, but what I'm saying is completely true. You might want to start looking for a lawyer now—"

"Y-Your Honor!"

Prosecutor Naruse interrupted me with a voice that was almost a shriek.

"…Defense counsel, don't you think you've gone too far?" The judge's tone had become slightly sharper.

"W-Wait a minute!"

At that moment, Ms. Yoshimura suddenly shouted.

"B-But didn't they find the stolen item in his bag in the end!? If that's the case, then it's obvious he's the culprit!"

"No, the fact that the stolen item was found in his bag is merely the result. And the person most responsible for leading to that result is none other than you, isn't it?"

"W-Wait just a moment!"

Prosecutor Naruse spoke up again. This man had been noisy for the last while.

"A trial is a place to first discuss the defendant's actions and then the consequences of those actions. What the defense counsel is saying makes no sense."

"Yes, that may be true. But, Prosecutor Naruse, don't you think that reasoning only applies when the truth of the outcome is already known?"

"Huh...? I'm sorry, defense counsel, but I'm not following you."

"Allow me to explain in a way you can understand. Your Honor, the defense requests to recall Keisuke Kuwabara, the man who restrained the defendant, as the next witness."

"…Hmm. Does the prosecution have any objections?"

"…No, none."

"Very well. Summon Mr. Kuwabara back to the stand."

Yoshimura left the witness stand, and in her place, Kuwabara took the stand.

As I watched the scene unfold, I desperately tried to think things through.

Something about Kuwabara, the man who had restrained the defendant, and his testimony had been bothering me.

Why was it bothering me? I hadn't been able to figure it out before.

But now I understood. The idea that people are inherently good is a lie. The world is full of sinister people trying to pin a crime on the innocent Mr. Yamashita.

"Defense counsel, please begin your questioning."

At the judge's voice, I turned to face Kuwabara.

"Now, Mr. Kuwabara."

I surprised myself by how cold my voice sounded.

"W-What is it?"

Kuwabara visibly flinched.

"I have a theory.

Let's say there's a man named Mr. A. Mr. A's job is dealing in antiques, and he was strolling through a flea market, hoping to find a hidden treasure.

By some stroke of luck—or coincidence—he found a famous piece of art, a plate. However, it had a price tag of 150 dollars, which was quite high. But the plate's actual value was much higher, so buying it wouldn't be a bad investment. Still, A hesitated to spend that much money. And just at that moment, the shop owner was deep in conversation with another customer and wasn't paying attention to Mr. A at all."

The jurors, the judge, even Prosecutor Naruse, were all watching me as if to say, "What is this girl talking about?" Everyone except Kuwabara.

"Thinking it was his chance, Mr. A stole the item. But right after that, the shop owner realized the plate was missing and shouted, 'Thief!' Before Mr. A could even react, he heard someone behind him shout, 'That person is the thief!' Mr. A must have been shocked when he turned around. But it wasn't him who was being accused—it was someone walking right next to him.

Mr. A wasn't used to committing petty theft, so he must have panicked. If even the slightest suspicion fell on him, the stolen item in his possession would be undeniable proof, and he'd be caught immediately. So Mr. A came up with a plan. He would catch the person being accused with his own hands and use them as a scapegoat. And luckily for him, the person next to him was carrying a tote bag, making it easy to slip the stolen item inside!"

"W-Wait a minute!"

Kuwabara shouted in a loud voice.

"A-are you saying that’s what happened!? That I’m the one who stole it!?"

"Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying, Mr. Kuwabara."

"T-That’s ridiculous! What proof do you have to accuse me of such a thing!?"

"There is proof.

Let’s go over your previous testimony. You said, 'When I checked the defendant's tote bag, I found a bowl.' Mr. Kuwabara, what exactly is a 'bowl'?"

"W-What...? Well, I mean... a bowl is a bowl, isn’t it?"

"That’s the strange part. You see, the stolen item was being sold as an ashtray. To me, it looks like an ashtray, or at most, a plate. It certainly doesn’t look like a bowl or a flowerpot."

"N-No, but a normal bowl is deeper than a plate but shallower than a deep soup bowl, with an open top. That’s what I meant."

"Oh, is that so? But most people wouldn’t call a plate like that a 'bowl.' Let’s try something else, then. Mr. Kuwabara, you are currently under oath, and intentionally lying would be a crime.

So let me ask you, you said your occupation was self-employed, but isn’t it actually related to the antique business?"

"W-Wha—"

Kuwabara’s face twisted in shock. There was no way he could talk his way out of this. His job and the name of his store were all written in the report Mr. Yamashika had given me.

"I-I do run a shop that sells antiques, but..."

"I see. Then let me ask you one more thing. Since you’re knowledgeable about antiques, I’d like your expert opinion. How much artistic value does the bowl, which was entered into evidence as Prosecution Exhibit A, have? I remind you, you are under oath, and any perjury will be a criminal offense."

The courtroom fell silent. Everyone was focused on Kuwabara’s next move.

Unable to bear the scrutiny any longer, Kuwabara finally gave in.

"…Could I take another look at that bowl—no, that ashtray?"

The judge gave permission, and the court officer handed over the ashtray, sealed in a plastic evidence bag.

"I'm sorry, but please don’t remove it from the bag. It’s still an important piece of evidence," the judge calmly added.

Kuwabara nodded and began examining the item, tapping it lightly and turning it over in his hands like an appraiser would.

"…Yes, this does have artistic value. It’s one of the famous old Imari pieces, made during the Keian period…"

The courtroom broke into a buzz of whispers.

"B-But wait a minute! Yes, I run an antique shop, and yes, this piece happens to be valuable, I admit that! But that doesn’t prove I’m the thief, does it!?"

I shrugged and spoke softly.

"Yes, that’s true. Just because you sell antiques doesn’t mean you’re the real thief.

Just because you used the word 'bowl,' a term ordinary people wouldn’t use, doesn’t mean you’re the real thief.

But I would like to request one more investigation."

"Oh? And what would that be?" asked the judge.

"I want the ashtray to be tested for fingerprints. Let’s recall the testimony. This witness said that he only restrained the defendant. We also know that the person who took the stolen ashtray out of the defendant's tote bag was the original owner, Mr. Tsukada. In other words, this ashtray should not have the witness’s fingerprints on it. But if those prints are found, when exactly would they have been left on it? That’s the question."

No sooner had I finished speaking—

Kuwabara’s shoulders slumped, and I was convinced the trial was as good as over.

◆

Postscript.

After that, the trial was postponed to allow for further investigation. The next day, the prosecution suddenly proposed to drop the charges. In other words, the defense had won, and Mr. Yamashita was acquitted and finally freed.

Hmm… At the time, I was only trying to win the acquittal, making up the most plausible theory based on the facts I had. In hindsight, it all worked out, but I guess it's worth speaking up sometimes.

Incidentally, this case did lead to some revisions in my future life plans, but for now, I'll keep that to myself…

必殺！弁護人

Finishing Move! Defense Attorney

My name is Shinogi Kamatsuka. My current occupation is a law apprentice—in simple terms, I’m a trainee for becoming either a lawyer or a prosecutor.

That day, in the law office of my somewhat begrudgingly respected mentor, Mr. Yamashika, the following conversation took place.

"I see. I understand your story. However, I'm afraid I cannot comply with your request."

That pompous voice, of course, belonged to Mr. Yamashika.

"Please, don’t say that! I’m begging you to somehow make it work!"

The person desperately pleading with him was a middle-aged man, sharply dressed in a suit, but with a slightly sinister look about him.

"I'm sorry, but what's impossible is impossible. Even someone like me, a lawyer, cannot assist in turning black into white."

"Please, I’m begging you! You’re the only one I can rely on!"

"This is beyond me. If you need help, I suggest you look elsewhere."

"I’ll pay whatever it takes!"

"How much?"

...That’s enough. I’ve started to understand a little about the absurdities of life lately.

◆

The story goes back about two hours to around 9 AM, when I arrived at the office as usual.

"Good morni—huh?"

Just as I stepped through the office door, I found myself stopping mid-greeting. There were two unfamiliar people present.

At this time of day, normally, the only person in the office would be Mr. Yamashika. Satsuki would be at school, and Mr. Kageno... well, he’s irregular, but he usually doesn’t show up until around 10 AM.

But that day was an exception. The Yamashika Law Office, usually devoid of clients and practically always in a “closed for business” state, had two customers seated on the sofa meant for visitors. That sofa, which is usually only used for Mr. Yamashika’s afternoon naps.

A young man and woman. The man looked a bit younger than Mr. Yamashika, maybe in his late twenties. As for the woman—although she was dressed in casual clothes, she didn’t look older than twenty. She seemed like a high school student.

"Ah, Isshaku, perfect timing. Get us some tea."

Without even glancing at me, Mr. Yamashika gave the order.

"Huh, um, okay."

I wanted to argue—I'm not the office tea server, and my name is Kamatsuka, not Isshaku—but if I made a scene in front of clients, I had no idea what kind of punishment Mr. Yamashika would have in store for me later. Reluctantly, I headed to the next room, which doubled as both the kitchen and Mr. Yamashika’s private office, to make the tea.

"Here you go."

I placed the three cups of tea on the table. The two young clients, apparently unused to such formalities, awkwardly returned the gesture with a clumsy nod.

"Isshaku, you can leave now."

"What... But, sir—"

"I said, you can leave."

Mr. Yamashika repeated in a firm tone, leaving no room for objection.

Ugh, how could this be? I’ve been coming to this office every day to gain practical experience in legal matters. Naturally, I assumed I’d get to observe how Mr. Yamashika handles consultations with clients.

But it seemed that Mr. Yamashika had no such intention. Once again, I felt the urge to protest, but going against this man would only bring terrible consequences later. Really terrible ones. With no other choice, I sulkily retreated to the next room.

Still, I couldn’t shake my curiosity. This was the first time I had ever seen Mr. Yamashika actually consult with a client. What kind of consultation was it? And how was the notoriously aloof Mr. Yamashika going to respond? My curiosity was insatiable.

This may be unbecoming of someone pursuing a career in law, but I couldn’t just pass up the chance to eavesdrop. After all, Mr. Yamashika only told me to leave the room—he never explicitly said I couldn’t listen in.

With that dubious reasoning in mind, I impulsively grabbed a glass from the sink. In cartoons and TV shows, you often see characters using a glass as a makeshift stethoscope, pressing it against the door to eavesdrop. I figured I might as well give it a try.

I pressed the glass against the door, then pressed my right ear against the glass. I must have looked ridiculous, the kind of sight that would make me unfit for marriage if anyone saw me.

Yet, despite my efforts, I could barely hear anything from the next room. Could it be that the scenes I’d seen in TV shows and cartoons were all lies?

With no other option, I put the glass aside and pressed my ear directly against the door. Once again, I must have looked completely ridiculous.

"So, Mr. Morihara... was it? Could you start by introducing yourself?"

This time, I could clearly hear Mr. Yamashika’s voice. Huh, it’s clearer now than it was when using the glass. I suppose relying on gadgets isn’t always the best idea.

"My name is Jun Morihara, and this is Keiko Honda. We’ve come to consult you about something regarding her."

The voice of the young man—Mr. Morihara, apparently—reached my ears.

"I see. You’ve come without an appointment, so what exactly is this consultation about?"

Mr. Yamashika’s pompous voice. No doubt he was sitting with his legs crossed, leaning back arrogantly. I’ve always thought that calling himself part of the service industry is an insult to people in other customer service jobs.

"She’s my cousin, and she used to live with her parents, but about six months ago, they passed away in an accident..."

"I see. My condolences. And?"

...Mr. Yamashika, could you at least pretend to sympathize a little?

"I’m still in high school, but my parents left a considerable inheritance behind."

This time, it was the young woman—Ms. Honda—speaking. Her voice was a little somber, but it had a certain strength to it.

"My grandmother is still with me, so we’re not struggling financially, but recently something troubling has come up..."

"I see. What is it?"

"Well, my parents had once borrowed money from a man named Yakuo Busujima. Of course, that debt has been fully repaid, but back then, he loaned the money without interest and gave us flexible repayment terms. He really helped us out."

"Y-Yakuo Busujima...?"

There was a slight strain in Mr. Yamashika’s voice.

Yakuo Busujima. Just hearing the name conjured up an image of a villain. There really are all sorts of names in the world.

"Mr. Busujima has done a lot for us," Ms. Honda continued. "I even remember him playing with me when I was little, and when my parents passed away, he took care of the funeral arrangements for me since I couldn’t do much. But over the past six months, his business has apparently started to struggle, and his personality has changed quite a bit."

"I see. And?"

"Recently, Mr. Busujima asked me if I could invest a little money in his business."

"I see."

I was beginning to put the pieces together.

In other words, this villainous-sounding Busujima was trying to exploit the emotional debt owed to him and squeeze money out of an underage girl—that's how it seemed.

"From what I’m hearing, Ms. Honda, it sounds like you don’t want to invest, is that right?"

"...Yes. I don’t really understand investments, and I don’t want to waste the inheritance my parents left behind. But at the same time, I owe Mr. Busujima a lot, so it’s hard to flat-out refuse him..."

"She says that, but I can’t help but feel this Busujima guy is up to no good."

Mr. Morihara’s voice rang out with determination.

"If he really needed an investment, he could just borrow from a legitimate financial institution like a bank. But instead, he’s using the favor he did for her parents to try and get money from her, right after they passed away. I can’t trust him at all."

"..."

The girl named Honda remained silent and didn’t try to defend Busujima. It seemed she harbored some distrust toward him as well.

"I see, I understand the situation now. So, Ms. Honda, what exactly do you want from me?"

"Yes. I was wondering if there’s a way I could refuse this offer without causing trouble..."

"That’s quite an unusual request. From what I’ve heard, there’s nothing complicated about it. If you don’t want to invest, just clearly convey that to the other party. That alone should be enough to reject most agreements."

I thought Mr. Yamashika’s response made perfect sense. Honestly, this seemed like the kind of issue you wouldn’t need to pay a lawyer to discuss.

However, for some reason, the two clients grew silent, and I couldn’t hear anything for a while.

"Hmm... It doesn’t seem like you’re planning to reject him outright. Has he offered some sweet temptation, like guaranteed profits?"

"No, that’s not it," Ms. Honda replied. "I owe Mr. Busujima a lot, so I can’t just reject him without consideration..."

"I see, so it’s difficult for you to say no. That does happen sometimes.

Now, Ms. Honda, forgive me for asking such a personal question, but how old are you?"

"Uh... I’m seventeen."

"I thought as much. So, you’re a minor. Next, you’ve mentioned the word ‘investment’ several times. How much, specifically, is he asking you to invest? Don’t worry, I won’t spill anything you say here."

"... About 150 thousand dollars."

O-One hundred and fifty thousand dollars...? Well, considering it's her parents' inheritance, it might be improper to debate whether that's a lot or a little, but hearing such an unfamiliar figure is still a bit shocking. That amount could buy three of the mountains behind my parents' house.

"I see. It's certainly abnormal for someone to demand a 150-thousand-dollars investment from a minor. I don't know much about this Busujima fellow, but from a lawyer's perspective, I can tell you that he's not someone you can trust.

You see, demanding money under the guise of 'investment' is a very convenient pretext. Unlike a debt, if the investment fails, they don't have to return the money.

Of course, there are many laws that regulate such malicious investments, but the legal system isn't free enough to monitor every investment in the world. Even if your money is swindled, it would be tough for a layperson to recover it. That's why investment fraud never seems to disappear. Basically, there are no 'too good to be true' deals out there, so the best advice is simply not to get involved in such things.

But I digress. Let's get back to the point. Frankly, it's difficult to give an abstract answer on how to refuse him politely, but in your case, there is one advantage you have."

"And what's that?"

Morihara asked eagerly.

"Ms. Honda, the fact that you're a minor. I believe it's Article 4 of the Japanese Civil Code that states something like this: 'Contracts made by a minor without the consent of their guardian can be voided.'"

"V-Voided...?"

"That's right. There are exceptions, such as contracts that do not disadvantage you, or money that you've been allowed to use freely—what we call pocket money. If the contract falls within that scope, it might not be voidable.

By the way, you mentioned your parents have passed away, correct? In that case, there should be someone who has taken over your guardianship."

"Yes. My grandmother, on my father's side."

"Then your grandmother acts as your guardian. Has she said anything to you about the inheritance from your parents?"

"Yes, she did mention something. She told me she would carefully manage the inheritance until I become an adult, and that I should let her know if I ever needed money. She sends me the necessary living expenses and school fees as needed."

"That sounds about right. And now, this man Busujima is asking for a 150-thousand-dollar investment, correct?"

"Yes."

"Then that's more than enough. For a student like you to invest 150 thousand dollars is clearly far removed from normal societal standards. Even if you did enter into an investment contract, if it was done without your guardian's consent, you would be able to void the contract easily due to your status as a minor."

"So, does that mean if I can't refuse him outright, it's okay to go ahead with the investment for now?"

"That's the technicality, yes. But that doesn't mean there wouldn't be any problems. You've heard the phrase, 'You can't squeeze blood from a stone,' right? If you agree to invest the money, and then Busujima goes bankrupt or skips town, it would still be difficult to recover the funds.

You said you're having trouble refusing him, correct? Then here's what you should do. Gently inform Busujima that, as a minor, your contracts can easily be voided. Make it clear that you're telling him this as a favor. And to prove you've informed him, record the conversation. That way, he won't be able to claim ignorance later.

If you do that, Busujima will have no choice but to back off for at least the next three years until you're an adult. And if he still tries to push you into investing, you'll have the recording, which will make it easy to go to the police or file a lawsuit."

"I-I see..."

Morihara spoke in an awed tone.

I was a bit impressed, too. As expected of Mr. Yamashika—he really is a lawyer after all.

"Um, but would it really be that easy to record our conversation? I feel like Busujima would definitely notice and get suspicious."

Ms. Honda asked.

"You don't need his permission to record the conversation. Just do it secretly."

"S-Secretly? Is that really okay?"

"Of course. If, for example, the police were secretly recording a suspect's conversation, it might not be accepted as evidence. But in civil matters—meaning disputes between private individuals—it's fine. Even if the recording was done secretly, it can still be used as evidence."

"I see... I understand now."

Ms. Honda's voice sounded noticeably brighter.

And with that, the consultation came to a close.

Hmm, that was a surprisingly straightforward answer from Mr. Yamashika, considering his usual behavior. It was a little unexpected. I half- expected him to say something like, "Just go ahead and kill this Busujima guy. Don't worry, I'll defend you and get you off scot-free." ...Then again, imagining it, that would actually be a terrifyingly perfect solution. After all, if it went to court, Mr. Yamashika could easily turn something shady into something totally legitimate. Honestly, with him, I wouldn't be surprised if he tried it someday...

◆

Thus, the first legal consultation I ever witnessed with Mr. Yamashika came to an end. The two clients, satisfied with Mr. Yamashika's advice, paid the 30 dollars consultation fee and left.

I wanted to say something like, "As expected of you, sir," but doing so would be like confessing that I had been eavesdropping, so I kept quiet.

◆

About two hours later.

There was a buzzing sound. It wasn't the phone. It was the signal indicating that someone new had arrived at the main entrance of the building, which was secured with an auto-lock system.

"Hey, Isshaku, there's another client."

Mr. Yamashika spoke without even looking at me.

I wasn't named "Isshaku," nor was I an assistant at this office—yet even if I pointed that out, I would just be ignored anyway. So, I obediently picked up the receiver.

"Hello, this is Yamashika Law Office."

"I’m sorry to bother you out of the blue. My name is Busujima, and I have a matter I would very much like to consult with Mr. Yamashika about."

"P-Please hold for a moment."

B-Busujima...? There’s no way I could forget such a distinctive name. I covered the receiver and turned around.

"Sir, there’s a man named Busujima who says he’d like to consult with you."

"Hmm. Let him in," Mr. Yamashika answered without hesitation.

"You may come in. He’ll see you now."

I said this into the receiver and operated the switch to open the auto-lock door.

"Please, go ahead."

I placed two cups of tea on the table.

The man named Busujima was exactly as I had expected from what Ms. Honda had described and from the sound of his name—he looked very much like a villain. Though he wore a suit, his slanted eyes and crooked smile made him look like a quintessential bad guy. Maybe I was being prejudiced, but still.

"Isshaku, get out of here."

"Alright."

Here we go again. I couldn’t exactly go against him, so I quickly retreated to the adjacent room.

But, of course, I couldn’t suppress my curiosity. Throwing shame and discretion to the wind, I pressed my ear against the door.

After all, this visitor was clearly from the opposite side of the previous clients who had come in earlier. It would be unreasonable not to be curious about what kind of consultation this was, and how Mr. Yamashika would respond.

"Now, what can I help you with?"

Mr. Yamashika’s voice was as pompous as ever.

"I apologize for barging in without an appointment, sir. My name is Yakuo Busujima, and I'm a businessman.

Now, Mr. Yamashika, I'll get straight to the point. About two hours ago, a young woman named Keiko Honda should have come to this office for a consultation."

"Well, I'm not sure. Regardless of who you are, I cannot discuss the affairs of other clients."

"Ah, I see. I apologize for not considering your position. However, I've already looked into it."

"What can I help you with?"

Mr. Yamashika calmly repeated the same phrase. I could feel that something big was about to happen.

"Understood. Then, I'll be blunt. I would like you to become my legal representative."

"Oh? Of course, I'd consider it if you ask, but what exactly do you want me to represent you for? Just so you know, I'm not particularly fond of taking on civil cases."

"Oh no, it wouldn't be anything that would burden you too much. I'll explain the details shortly. But I must ask that you keep this strictly confidential."

"Of course. As lawyers, we do not have the right to disclose anything we learn through our work."

That's the duty of confidentiality.

"Indeed, that would be sufficient.

You see, I manage several companies, but due to the recent economic downturn, my business has been facing some financial pressure.

However, it's only a temporary situation. If I could just secure a bit more capital, I'd be able to turn things around.

But, well, the banks these days are reluctant to lend, you see. Even for a mere 150 thousand dollars, they make the screening process incredibly strict. Without collateral, they won't even consider it."

A mere 150 thousand...? If you're asking for that much, it's no surprise the banks would be strict.

"Now, there was a couple I had been helping out with various things for a while. But recently, they passed away in an accident, and their only child, their eldest daughter, inherited their estate. That girl is a seventeen-year-old named Keiko Honda."

...I've heard this story somewhere before.

"Let me be clear, I have no intention of making things difficult for the child of a couple I helped. If she could just lend me some money now, I could repay her many times over. So, I suggested she invest around 150 thousand dollars."

"Hmm, I see."

"But this girl, she completely ignored the favor I did for her parents and refuses to go along with the deal. I'm offering her a great opportunity, and she turns it down.

To make matters worse, when I met with her earlier, she somehow found out that contracts made by minors can be voided. She told me it would be better if we didn't discuss this matter again until she becomes an adult in three years.

I'm not asking to take her money. I'm saying if she invests, I'll repay her many times over. Isn't she an ungrateful little brat?"

"Yes, quite so."

M-Mr. Yamashika... You didn't really need to agree with him there.

"So, Mr. Yamashika, I'm asking for your assistance. Specifically, I want your help in figuring out how I can get that girl to invest."

The saying "a name reflects the person" seems to be spot on, at least in the case of this Busujima guy.

What a self-centered request. Ms. Honda was simply asserting her rights. And yet, here he was asking for advice on how to take those rights away. No upstanding lawyer who follows the law and adheres to societal ethics would ever agree to such a request.

But the issue is—words like "upstanding" don't exactly suit Mr. Yamashika.

"I see. I understand what you're asking. But if that's all, couldn't we just discuss it here? There's no need for me to become your representative. After all, being your representative would cost you a bit more. The retainer fee alone would be around 600 hundred dollars."

Without giving any kind of lecture, Mr. Yamashika stated this matter-of-factly.

"Oh, I have no problem paying the fee.

The thing is, from what I've looked into, that girl—she should've been here at this office for a consultation about two hours ago. If she comes back again for advice, you, as a lawyer, would have to counsel her, wouldn't you? But if you became my representative, you'd be obligated to prioritize my interests above all else. That's what I'm asking for."

I-I see. So that's why he's asking for representation. I couldn't help but understand his logic. It was dirty, but it made sense. If Mr. Yamashika became Mr. Busujima's representative, he would be bound to protect all of Mr. Busujima's interests and rights. If Ms. Honda came back for advice, he wouldn't give her any decent counsel.

"I see. I understand your request. Normally, I don't take on civil cases, but given the circumstances, I could represent you.

However, the law regarding contracts made by minors being voidable is well-known. If you continue to pressure her into investing despite that, it could border on fraud or coercion. As a lawyer, I cannot provide counsel for something like that."

Thank goodness, that's the Mr. Yamashika I know. He may act like a villain most of the time, but at least he's still a lawyer known for defending the rights of the wrongly accused. There's no way he'd agree to something like this.

But then...

"I am, of course, fully aware of that. I don't want to end up in a jail cell either. I have no intention of causing any trouble for you. I merely want you to tell me of a way to resolve the situation legally. I believe that a lawyer as knowledgeable as you can certainly help me with that..."

"I see, within the bounds of legality, is it?"

"Yes, within the bounds of legality. I repeat, I am not asking for anything that would break the law."

After thinking deeply about what Busujima had said, Mr. Yamashika finally answered.

"I understand your request. However, I still cannot comply with it."

What Mr. Yamashika said after that—well, I ask that you recall the conversation from the beginning...

◆

The conversation continued, as if between a corrupt official and a subordinate.

"Well, first of all, I'll need you to pay the retainer fee for me to act as your representative."

"Yes, I understand. How much would that be?"

"For now, 200 dollars will suffice."

"I understand. I'll pay it right away."

200 dollars... Mr. Yamashika was demanding such a large retainer fee for what was essentially a simple job.

And Busujima, who had complained about not having money, was ready to pay that amount without hesitation.

"Very well. With this, I am now your legal representative.

As I've said repeatedly, I will not offer any advice that would lead to breaking the law. And should you engage in any illegal activity, I will immediately withdraw as your representative. Please keep that in mind."

"Yes, I understand perfectly. In other words, as long as it doesn't break the law, you'll advise me as much as you can, correct?"

"Yes, that's essentially correct."

Mr. Yamashika's voice sounded somewhat amused. He was probably smiling slyly at that moment.

Conversations between lawyers and their clients are fully protected by attorney-client privilege. Under this privilege, not even a court can compel a lawyer to disclose what was discussed. Not even God or Buddha could make it happen.

In other words, officially speaking, as long as the client stays silent, the lawyer won't be held accountable for giving advice—even in matters like fraud. The lawyer cannot be charged with aiding or abetting a crime.

Of course, lawyers are bound by ethical guidelines and are forbidden from assisting with malicious consultations. But since conversations with clients are protected under confidentiality,

even if a lawyer were to offer advice on illegal matters, no one could prove it. Unless the client commits a crime and gets arrested, there's no issue as long as the law isn't broken.

So, if a lawyer were to give a client just a little tip on how to exploit a loophole, it wouldn't be a problem for the lawyer. The result? People who can't make the law work in their favor end up having to suffer in silence—just like Ms. Honda in this case.

But for Mr. Yamashika to do that... Well, I guess I should have seen it coming.

"So, how can I get that girl to invest?"

"There are a few ways.

It's certainly difficult to make a contract like that with a minor. On top of that, you're asking a seventeen-year-old girl to invest 150 thousand dollars. From a common-sense perspective, it's obviously a strange request. Even if you manage to get the guardian's consent and seal the deal, there's a good chance the court might find it questionable in the future.

But there is a way. One option is for you to marry the girl... but that's probably not feasible, is it?"

"Yes, that would be rather inappropriate in the eyes of society."

I heard Mr. Busujima let out a bitter laugh.

"Then there's another option. You could become her legal guardian. Of course, this would require the current guardian to transfer those rights to you."

"A legal guardian... you say? What does that entail?"

"You've likely heard the term before, and you can probably picture it."

"Yes, more or less. It's basically about being a protector or offering some kind of support, right?"

"That's right. As her guardian, you would take on various obligations and rights related to the girl. But the most important one for you would be the right to manage her assets.

In short, the guardian ensures that the minor, who lacks full capacity to manage their responsibilities, doesn't squander their assets. The guardian has the authority to manage, preserve, use, and improve those assets.

Of course, this doesn't mean you can waste the assets however you like. Asset management must always be for the benefit of the person being guarded. If the assets diminish, you could be held liable for negligence or even embezzlement.

That said, I doubt the courts have the time to monitor every single case of asset management."

"I see, I see. In other words, as long as the assets don't diminish when the right to manage them is returned, anything goes, right?"

"Well, that's a bit of a leap in logic. Of course, if you manage the assets recklessly with the intention of paying them back later, that would be a crime."

"Understood. I wouldn't dream of causing you any trouble, Mr. Yamashika.

But, for example, if I were to make a sound investment on behalf of the girl with no malicious intent, it wouldn't be illegal, would it?"

"Yes, that's correct. A certain level of investment is part of managing assets. Of course, if it's a risky investment that could result in the loss of all the money, that would be illegal."

"In other words, as long as the person managing the assets genuinely believes it's a safe investment, there's no problem?"

"Well, there's a bit of nuance to that.

But yes, as long as the assets aren't diminished by the time the management rights are returned, there wouldn't be any issues."

"I see, I see. This is all very informative, ha-ha-ha..."

This conversation is starting to sound really shady...

"But, is it even possible for me, who isn't related to her by blood, to become her legal guardian?"

"There will be a few hurdles. To become her guardian, the current guardian—likely a relative—would need to resign, and then the family court would need to appoint you as the new guardian."

"The family court has to appoint me? That sounds..."

"Yes, the appointment is necessary, but the family court doesn't conduct a thorough investigation. If you have a recommendation from her relatives, it should be quite simple."

"I see."

For some reason, Mr. Busujima's voice sounded pleased.

I couldn’t see his face through the door, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that Mr. Busujima was smiling slyly at that moment.

"If that’s the case, it’s quite advantageous. You see, I’ve been quite helpful to her parents, and I have a good reputation among her relatives... And besides, I have a few other, shall we say, bargaining chips.

The only issue is that the girl doesn’t seem to like me very much."

"Hmm, well, that’s not much of an issue. After all, she’s a minor, and she’s in a position to be guarded. The court usually places more weight on the opinions of the relatives."

"I see, I see. As expected from you, Mr. Yamashika. I’m so glad I made you my representative. Uwa-ha-ha-ha!"

◆

After that satisfied laugh, Mr. Busujima left.

I was immediately seized by the urge to barge into the next room and confront Mr. Yamashika.

—'Mr. Yamashika, this is terrible! You were on Ms. Honda’s side just a moment ago, but now you’ve turned around and become the legal representative of someone who’s against her?'

But I could already imagine the kind of response he’d give.

'Indeed, I was consulted by Ms. Honda, and I gave her advice. She and her cousin left satisfied. At that point, the contract with them was completely over. After that, it’s my business who I represent. Plus, anyone has the right to hire a lawyer'—that’s probably what he’d say.

Mr. Yamashika would shamelessly declare that if those two had hired him first, none of this would have happened…

But, the story wasn’t over yet.

◆

The very next day. In our Yamashika Law Office, which rarely receives visitors, we had another client two days in a row.

And that client was none other than Mr. Morihara, who had come with Ms. Honda the previous day. I wondered what had happened to her.

"Isshaku, tea."

"Yes, sir."

By the third time, it felt like a routine. I quickly prepared the tea, placed two cups on the table, and retreated to the next room before I could be shooed out.

Once again, ignoring any sense of decency, I pressed my ear against the door.

"Well then, shall we hear what you've come to talk about?"

At that moment, Mr. Yamashika was already representing Busujima, who was in opposition to Mr. Morihara. Perhaps because of that, his voice was even more condescending than when he had dealt with Ms. Honda the previous day.

"Yes. It's about Keiko... I mean, Ms. Honda, who came here with me yesterday.

After we left your office yesterday, the two of us went straight to meet with Busujima. We wanted to firmly reject his investment proposal once and for all.

Thanks to the advice you gave us, we managed to turn him down. But then, in the evening, Ms. Honda suddenly got a phone call from her grandmother. Oh, I mentioned this yesterday, but Ms. Honda and I are cousins, so we share the same grandmother."

"I see. And?"

"It seems her grandmother said something like this. That she would transfer her guardianship to Busujima. That Busujima had been helpful in the past, and he'd probably manage the inheritance better than anyone else."

"I see. And?"

"Mr. Yamashika, it's not just 'and'! If Busujima becomes Ms. Honda's guardian, he'll be able to manage the inheritance she received from her parents, right? Please, tell me how we can prevent that from happening."

"I see, that's your concern. But, in a case like this, there's no need to consult me. Whatever decision your grandmother makes, I have no right to interfere. You should be the one persuading her."

As usual, Mr. Yamashika's words were perfectly reasonable.

A brief silence followed. Then, I heard the determined voice of Mr. Morihara.

"... I understand. I'll tell you everything.

The truth is... the reason my grandmother accepted Busujima's proposal is because of me.

I used to work part-time at a store Busujima managed. During that time, there was an incident where money went missing from the register. And since I was the one responsible for the register that day..."

"You were suspected of stealing it?"

"Yes..."

Mr. Morihara said with a pained voice.

"Of course, I didn't do it. There was no proof whatsoever.

I never intended to burden Ms. Honda with something that was entirely my fault. Even if Busujima decided to accuse me, I was ready to face it.

But Busujima, of all people, told my grandmother about it. He half-threatened her, saying that if she transferred guardianship to him, he wouldn't make the matter public... And so, my grandmother couldn't refuse.

Please, Mr. Yamashika, I don't care what happens to me. But I can't bear the thought of causing her any trouble. Please, tell me... what should I do?"

Wow, what a sudden turn of events.

Now that I think about it, yesterday Busujima did mention something about having leverage, but I didn't expect it to be something like this.

"I'm sorry, but—"

As expected, Mr. Yamashika remained true to his character.

"Mr. Morihara. I cannot offer you any advice."

"What!? W-Why not…!?"

"I am currently the legal representative of a certain individual. It is my duty to protect that person's rights and interests. To advise you now would be against that person's interests."

"W-What…? No way, Mr. Yamashika, you don't mean... that person is Busujima, do you...!?"

"I have no obligation or duty to tell you who my client is. I'm sorry, but I must ask you to leave. No consultation fee is necessary."

"... Damn it!"

He must have realized everything at that moment. I heard the frustrated voice of Mr. Morihara, followed by a loud bang as the office door was slammed shut violently.

It’s no wonder Mr. Morihara was angry. Ugh, from what I heard, even I started to see Mr. Yamashika as a complete villain.

In the past, I might have been so ashamed of working for someone like him that I would’ve packed up and gone back to the countryside.

But now, I couldn’t help but think this:

This is the renowned Mr. Yamashika, a lawyer known throughout the legal world. In the end, this is what lawyers are like. In life, those who can maneuver well are the ones who come out on top.

Still, a lawyer should be the ally of the weak, of those in vulnerable positions.

This time, even if it was against Mr. Yamashika, I found myself getting a little angry.

I stormed into the next room, where Mr. Yamashika was leisurely sipping his tea, and yelled at him.

"Mr. Yamashika! That was way too much!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Don’t play dumb! That consultation just now! Mr. Morihara was clearly being blackmailed! Blackmail is a serious crime! How could you throw him out like that? Are you siding with a criminal!?"

"Oh? That’s strange."

"... Huh?"

For some reason, Mr. Yamashika glared at me, and in that instant, my confidence was completely shattered.

"Hey, Isshaku. You were supposed to be in the next room. How do you know what was discussed in that consultation?"

"Uh, um, well, you see, it’s just that, um, I kind of overheard bits and pieces of your voices, so..."

"Hmm, I see. But surely, Isshaku, you weren't eavesdropping in the next room, were you?"

"N-No, of course not! I would never do something like that. It's just that, well, your voices happened to be, um, a little loud, and I accidentally overheard, that's all."

"Well, that's fine then. But you know this already, don't you? Conversations between lawyers and their clients are off-limits, even to the courts or to God. You're aware of your position, aren't you? As a lawyer-in-training, I'd hate to have to turn you over to the police for eavesdropping."

"Y-Yes, I understand perfectly."

I squeezed out the words, feeling like a frog being stared down by a snake.

But wait! This isn't the time to get intimidated by Mr. Yamashika. I have to stand up for Mr. Morihara!

"B-But Mr. Yamashika. I only overheard by accident, but... still, to turn away someone who was clearly being blackmailed, don't you think that's too much...?"

"Oh? Then let me ask you this: where's the proof that my client is a criminal?"

"W-What? But Mr. Morihara said he was being threatened!"

Mr. Yamashika sighed dramatically, as if exasperated.

"Are you some gullible prosecutor who takes a drunkard's words at face value?

Listen, think carefully. Sure, Morihara was ranting about being blackmailed, but that guy is on the opposite side of my client. If I believed him without any proof and abandoned my client, that would make me a disgrace as a lawyer."

"Ugh, yes, that's true, but…"

Once again, Mr. Yamashika's words were correct. It's common for people on opposing sides to try to discredit each other. A lawyer certainly shouldn't take that at face value.

"But, but Mr. Yamashika, there's still a possibility that this Mr. Busujima person really did blackmail Mr. Morihara's grandmother!"

"Can you make decisions based on mere possibilities? Sure, if it were confirmed without a doubt that blackmail had occurred, I might consider dropping Busujima as a client, but until that is proven, I'm still his representative. That's how it works."

"... Y-Yes, I understand, but…"

"Do you understand? If you do, then stop interfering. Now, go buy some snacks to go with the tea."

That really pissed me off.

"Understood. Yes, you're absolutely right, Mr. Yamashika. Fine, I'll just head out to do some shopping."

I barely managed to suppress my anger and say that.

I believe in Mr. Morihara. And right now, he needs advice.

I immediately rushed out of the office to go after Mr. Morihara.

◆

"Mr. Yamashika! We have a serious problem!"

The one who barged into the office the very next day was none other than Mr. Busujima.

"What seems to be the problem, Mr. Busujima?"

"T-That girl, Honda! She's suddenly announced that she's getting married! Apparently, under the law, even a 17-year-old is considered an adult once they're married! If that's the case, there's no point in becoming her guardian anymore! You have to help me!"

"Oh, that sounds rather troublesome.

But before that, there's something I'd like to ask you."

"Huh? W-What is it?"

"Actually, yesterday, a young man by the name of Morihara came to my office for a consultation."

"W-What!? That guy!? What did he want!?"

"That's not important. I'm the one speaking right now, not you. Be quiet and listen."

"Y-Yes, sir."

Overwhelmed by Mr. Yamashika's commanding presence, Mr. Busujima fell silent.

"Now, this Morihara said something rather interesting. He claimed that you called his grandmother the night before last."

"Yes, I did. So what?"

"What exactly did you discuss with her?"

"It wasn't anything too serious. That Morihara guy, as I mentioned yesterday, is Honda's cousin. In other words, his grandmother is Honda's guardian. The truth is, I have some dirt on Morihara. So, I had a chat with his grandmother, asking if she'd hand over guardianship to me."

"Oh? And did the grandmother agree to that?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Hmm, that's quite fascinating. What kind of dirt do you have on him?"

With a smirk, Mr. Busujima grinned wickedly.

"Well, you see, Morihara used to work part-time at a store I managed. There was an incident where money went missing from the register while he was in charge. So, I told his grandmother that I was ready to press charges for that. After that, everything was easy."

At that moment, Mr. Yamashika's face twisted into a matching smirk.

"You handled that rather skillfully.

But, Mr. Busujima, there's something I need to tell you."

"Huh? What is it?"

Suddenly, Mr. Yamashika glared at Mr. Busujima with a fierce expression.

"I'm cutting ties with you. I told you before that if you did anything illegal, I'd drop you immediately.

Threatening someone into handing over guardianship using the threat of criminal charges? That's called blackmail."

Mr. Busujima, taken aback by Mr. Yamashika's sudden change in demeanor, stammered.

"W-Wait a minute! This is a misunderstanding, Mr. Yamashika! Sure, I might have done something that could be considered borderline blackmail, but there's no way Morihara or his grandmother will take this to the police! If they did, Morihara would be arrested for theft!"

"That's irrelevant. What matters is that you did something illegal. Whether or not Morihara goes to the police doesn't concern me.

As a lawyer, I can't be complicit in a crime. I told you this before. Now, get out of my office, and don't come back."

"W-What…!"

At last, even Mr. Busujima snapped.

"Do you think you can just abandon your client like this and get away with it? I'll report you to the bar association! I'll have your law license revoked!"

"Go ahead and report me if you want. However, if you do, I'll have to explain why I dropped you as a client. In other words, I'll have to tell them that you blackmailed someone. I don't care if Morihara's theft gets exposed. It's none of my business.

But if you want to publicly declare yourself a criminal, be my guest."

"Ugh..."

"If you understand, then get out of this office right now. Don't ever show your face here again."

"You'll regret this!"

Mr. Busujima spat out a typical Busujima-like threat and stormed out of the office.

"Hey, Isshaku."

Once Busujima left and peace returned to the office, Mr. Yamashika suddenly called me.

"Y-Yes, what is it, sir?"

"You did something yesterday when you went out, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I chased after Mr. Morihara and told him about Japanese Civil Code Article 753."

"Hmph..."

Civil Code Article 753. It states that when a minor gets married, they are considered to have reached adulthood. As a result, the guardian loses all authority, including the right to manage the minor's assets.

True, once a minor marries, they lose the right to void contracts on the grounds of being underage, but that's an issue that can be solved by simply standing firm against Mr. Busujima.

For a minor to marry, they need the consent of a guardian. If Mr. Busujima had become her guardian, it would have been a problem, but there are various procedures required to become a guardian, and for now, her grandmother still holds parental authority, so there's no immediate issue.

From the way Mr. Morihara spoke, it was pretty clear he and Ms. Honda were already involved. So I told him straight: if he truly cared about her, if he had nothing to hide, he should officially marry her and stand strong together against Mr. Busujima's threats.

Judging by how Mr. Busujima stormed in today, it seems like Mr. Morihara made up his mind. That's a good thing, I'm sure.

"I have one question for you, Isshaku."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Up until yesterday, this office was representing Busujima. So why did you go and take Morihara's side without permission? Sure, in the end, I dropped Busujima as a client, but there are proper channels for this. Depending on your answer, you won't get off easy."

"But I'm not a lawyer or an office worker at this firm, am I? I've never even been paid. You've said so yourself, haven't you? I'm just a tea server. A tea server can give advice to anyone they like, right?"

"... Hmph, you've certainly gotten good at twisting words."

With that, Mr. Yamashika buried himself back in his newspaper, as if to say he had nothing more to say.

Yes, of course, I've gotten good at twisting words.

After all, I'm studying under Mr. Yamashika.

新説・さんびきのこぶた

A New Theory: The Three Little Pigs

On that day, thanks to the influence of a cold front that had lingered over the Kanto region for a long time, snow was starting to fall here and there.

The location was Akeno South Public Middle School, 2nd Year Class A. The time was after school, 3 PM.

The desks in the classroom were arranged in a completely different way than usual.

Though the teacher's desk was still in front of the blackboard as always, instead of the teacher, the class president from Class C, with his glasses gleaming, was sitting there. The desks, which were usually neatly lined up, had all been moved out into the hallway. To the left of the teacher’s desk sat seven people, and to the right, eight, totaling fifteen boys and girls from Class C and Class D, sitting in chairs as jurors.

In the back half of the classroom, chairs were haphazardly arranged, with students from our Class B, as well as other students from different classes who were interested in the upcoming event, crowding in.

In front of the jury seats were two sets of desks and chairs facing each other, with a single desk placed in between them. The seat on the right was for the defense, the left for the prosecution, and the central desk served as the witness stand. It was essentially a forced recreation of the courtroom scenes you often see on TV dramas, using classroom desks and chairs.

And sitting at the defense side was none other than me, Iyo Satsuki. A current middle school girl, dedicated to the cause of justice—though if you ask people ten years from now, they’d probably embellish my story with something like that.

A boy who didn’t look like a middle schooler, Takeru Yamato, was sitting at the teacher’s desk, acting as the judge. He scanned the classroom—or rather, the courtroom. He was quite handsome in his glasses, tall, with excellent athletic ability, strong, and on top of that, academically outstanding—a ridiculously talented guy. However, his personality was, in a bad way, way too unique.

"Alright then. Uribatake, are you ready?"

"Yes, I’m quite ready."

The girl—Yoshiko Uribatake—answered in a similarly haughty manner, not looking like a middle schooler herself. She was an unfortunate girl whose brain seemed to have been underdeveloped in favor of her chest, despite having a prosecutor for an older brother.

Moreover, she had the worst kind of personality, always trying to act superior to others, which is why she constantly tried to compete with me, the idol of the school.

Because of her, she and I are infamous throughout the school as bitter enemies. Naturally, she's the actual bitter one in this scenario.

"Satsuki, are you ready?"

"Yes, let's get started already!"

Not wanting to lose to Uribatake, I answered confidently.

"Very well then, let's begin the class trial."

The judge's glasses flashed with a gleam.

◆

The cause of the incident this time was the school's traditional annual event, which everyone despised.

Let me explain bluntly. Every year around this time, when the snow starts falling, the second-year students at Akeno South Public Middle School are required to perform a play for an audience that includes students, their families, and nearby residents. It's commonly referred to as the Drama Festival. Honestly, if you were in the drama club, it would be one thing, but for us, who are on the verge of entering our rebellious phase, there's no way we'd voluntarily want to perform in a play.

To make matters worse, for some reason, our Class B ended up having to do a joint performance with our sworn enemy, Class A, which included Uribatake.

There was no way this wouldn't lead to problems.

From the very beginning, the process of deciding what play to perform turned into utter chaos. Our Class B advocated for "Momotaro," while the Uribatake-led Class A pushed for "Little Red Riding Hood." There was no particular reason why it had to be Momotaro, but given that there were only two factions and we hated each other, our debate, with no room for compromise, dragged on endlessly.

It was then.

Suddenly, the classroom door opened, and that guy—Takeru Yamato—walked in.

"Is there a dispute here!? A dispute!? That won't do! First, explain the situation to me! You must not be swayed by emotions! Do not make decisions based on assumptions! To resolve conflicts, first explain the situation to a third party, and let them judge it calmly and objectively-ooaah!?"

At that time, it was still during a long homeroom—basically, still class time.

"Alright, alright, class president, you're not allowed to leave the classroom during class."

One of the girls, the vice president of Class C, casually grabbed him by the collar and dragged him away.

That little incident didn't really matter, but unfortunately, our Class B and Class A couldn't find any common ground, and the discussion continued well into after-school hours.

However, Takeru Yamato was apparently a man without the words "give up" or "stay out of it" in his dictionary. As soon as school ended, he marched right back into our classroom and forcibly started listening to how things had gone.

Once he understood everything, he stood at the teacher's desk and began delivering a speech, like a politician addressing soldiers heading to Stalingrad.

"Everyone! Continuing this fruitless argument will gain you nothing! Please, listen to me!

First of all, the story of Momotaro involves a hero who sets off with three companions to defeat ogres! On the other hand, Little Red Riding Hood is about a girl who almost gets eaten by a wolf, but in the end, she defeats it! Therefore, I propose a compromise story that combines both Momotaro and Little Red Riding Hood! Three companions, defeating a wolf! In other words…!"

At that moment, like Hitler giving a speech, Yamato clenched his fist and shouted.

"The Three Little Pigs!"

He's out of his mind.

Everyone must have thought that at first. Why in the world would combining Momotaro and Little Red Riding Hood result in The Three Little Pigs?

However, we had already been arguing fiercely for over an hour, and we were all mentally exhausted. The idea of combining the keywords "three" and "defeating a wolf" to come up with The Three Little Pigs didn't seem entirely unreasonable at that point—or at least that's what some of us started to think.

To be honest, it wasn’t like we were dead set on doing Momotaro or Little Red Riding Hood. The reason the debate had dragged on was simply because we didn’t want to accept the other side’s suggestion.

And so, in the end, we decided to perform The Three Little Pigs.

The Three Little Pigs. Probably no middle schooler is unfamiliar with the story. Three pig brothers each build a house, but the oldest, who built his house out of straw, and the second brother, who built his house out of wood, have their houses blown down by the wolf and are eaten. Only the youngest pig, who built his house out of bricks, survives the wolf’s attacks. Even after that, the wolf tries to lure the pig out by inviting him to pick apples or go to a fair, but the pig cleverly avoids the traps, and in the end, when the wolf climbs down the chimney, the pig boils him alive in a pot and eats him.

Once the play was decided, the meetings progressed fairly smoothly.

Naturally, the first thing that had to be decided was the casting. After all, we needed to assign the roles of the three pigs and the wolf.

However, the role of a pig, no matter how you look at it, wasn’t something any of us young girls—or even the boys—wanted to do. Fortunately, we had a total of three boys from the drama club between Class A and Class B, so—half forcing it on them—the roles were quickly decided.

Then, we came up with names for the pigs. Since there were three of them, it would be annoying to constantly refer to them as "the oldest pig," "the second pig," and "the youngest pig." So, we decided to name the three pigs after the actors playing them, in order from oldest to youngest.

They were Pork Yoshida, Pig Saito, and Swine Ishii.

I often think to myself, there are just too many people around me with terrible naming sense.

Next, we moved on to the discussion of who would play the role of the wolf.

The first name that came up was a boy from Class A named Takase. There was a reason his name was brought up first. Apparently, he was well-known for being a ladies' man. It was certain that he would literally become a "wolf" in the future.

However, this casting didn’t come to fruition due to his own objection.

"Not interested unless the piglets are played by cute girls."

His reason was laughably inappropriate for a middle schooler.

As I mentioned earlier, there’s no way we, delicate young girls, would want to play the role of pigs. In the end, the idea of casting the completely unmotivated Takase as the wolf was rejected, and the next name that came up was a boy named Miyateru.

There was also a reason why Miyateru was recommended for the wolf role. He was quite large, with a bit of a carnivorous, beast-like face. And, to top it off, he had a rather peculiar habit.

When the boys would play soccer or other sports during gym class, he would watch the sweaty boys and mutter to himself:

"Ah, how beautiful..."

Something is definitely wrong with him.

But, well, considering he would be playing the wolf attacking the piglets, there was no one more suited for the role. The fact that he seemed to get pretty into the idea was a bit scary, though.

Naturally, the boys playing the piglets opposed this, but since we were running out of time after the failure with Takase, they had no choice but to give in. Thus, "Wolf" Miyateru was born.

With that, the main cast was set. The passerby who provides the piglets with building materials, the stage crew, and other roles were decided smoothly as well.

Incidentally, I became part of the scriptwriting team. Well, since no one else has a sharper tongue than I do, it was only natural.

However, an unexpected problem arose. Among the six members of the scriptwriting team was none other than Uribatake.

Normally, we would immediately butt heads and engage in a war of words. But, well, this was "The Three Little Pigs," a simple story. There wasn’t much room for me and Uribatake to argue over the script.

However, the spark of conflict came from something truly trivial.

A few days later, when the script was almost finished, a boy from Class A muttered something.

"Now that I think about it, wouldn't this youngest pig, Swine Ishii, be kind of a bad guy? Should we not portray him as a bit more cunning?"

He sounded a bit like he was speaking in a Tohoku dialect, but he was definitely from Kanto. It was just a fake Tohoku accent.

"What d'you mean? How is the youngest pig cunning?"

A boy from Class B, speaking in a fake Kansai dialect, asked. Why are there so many oddballs at this age?

"Well, think about it. Even though the wolf was trying to kill him, he boiled it alive and ate it, right? Isn't that a bit much?"

"What are you talking about? The pig was about to be killed! It's only natural to defend yourself, even if it means going that far."

"Sure, I understand it was self-defense, but did he really need to eat the wolf afterward? If it were just self-defense, he didn't have to go that far. Doesn't this seem more like murder?"

"Well, the wolf did kill his two older brothers, didn't it? It's only natural that there'd be some murderous intent."

"See? If there was murderous intent and he ate the wolf, then it's not really self-defense, is it?"

It was a truly petty argument.

But, well, this was Class A and Class B, who were natural enemies. The argument quickly escalated, drawing in classmates from all around.

And I, of course, love a good debate more than acting in a play, so I found myself joining in.

"For Swine Ishii, the youngest pig, Wolf Miyateru was a terrifying predator who was trying to eat him. His two older brothers had already been killed and eaten, and it was clear that his own life was in danger.

But a pig couldn't possibly fight a wolf and win face-to-face. Regardless of the method, anyone can see that boiling the wolf alive was a necessary act."

That was the argument from Class B.

But, where there is light, there is always shadow.

"Hoo-hoho! Satsuki, what's with that argument full of holes?"

My statement seemed to ignite the fire in another demoness.

"It's true that the wolf may have had clear murderous intent towards the pig, and the pig had the right to defend itself to the best of its ability.

However, without even considering alternatives to killing, the pig boiled the wolf alive by surprise, and then ate the corpse. Anyone can see that this goes beyond the bounds of self-defense."

That was the argument from Class A.

Thus, the heated argument started once again. This time, the flames of conflict burned brighter than ever and didn't seem like they'd die down easily.

But then, suddenly, the classroom door swung open, and he walked in.

"Is there a dispute here!? A dispute!?" And so on.

Now, to shift the story a bit, in our school, something called a "class trial" is frequently held.

A class trial. As the name suggests, it's a trial conducted entirely by us students. The idea is that when a problem arises within the school, the students hold a trial to decide right from wrong. Incidentally, the person who came up with this idea was none other than Yamato, the "Is there a dispute here!? A dispute!?" guy.

You might think that a trial conducted by students would quickly become unfair, but this guy, Yamato, takes mediating disputes as his hobby and is known for being quite impartial. He sets rules, assigns roles for the defense and prosecution, presides as the judge, and ensures a fair trial. He even leaves the final judgment up to the jurors, who are carefully selected. If you take a hobby this far, you've got to respect it.

And in these class trials, I've clashed with Uribatake many times.

I am aiming to become a lawyer in the future. To that end, I've been frequently visiting some half-decent defense attorney, honing my skills in criminal court cases and gaining all sorts of knowledge.

And my mortal enemy, Uribatake, whether through fate or not, has a prosecutor brother and supposedly receives daily lessons from him.

We were already on bad terms. So, when a dispute like this arises, the decision to hold a trial is practically set in stone.

Thus, a class trial was arranged to determine whether the killing of Wolf Miyateru by the youngest pig, Swine Ishii, was excessive self-defense, as claimed by Uribatake's Class A, or legitimate self-defense, as we from Class B asserted.

The judge, of course, was Yamato. Uribatake was the prosecutor, representing Class A, who claimed it was excessive self-defense, and I naturally took on the role of defense attorney for the youngest pig, asserting it was legitimate self-defense on behalf of Class B.

There was nothing particularly unusual about this. After all, class trials were something that happened quite regularly at our school.

◆

"Now then—"

The judge began.

"Before we start the trial, I'd like to say something to the jurors and the audience.

This trial is not about whether or not the defendant, Swine Ishii, killed the victim, Wolf Miyateru. Our purpose is to determine whether the defendant's killing of the victim was an act of self-defense or excessive self-defense. Therefore, while the procedure may differ slightly from our usual trials, the jurors' duty remains unchanged. I expect you to listen to both the defense and prosecution without bias or preconceived notions, and to render a fair verdict.

Then, Uribatake, please proceed with the reading of the indictment."

"Understood, Your Honor."

Uribatake puffed out her chest, which seemed to have grown larger in place of her brain, and began her grand explanation.

"The defendant, Swine Ishii, after having his two older brothers, Pork Yoshida and Pig Saito, murdered by the victim, Wolf Miyateru, harbored a deep sense of revenge. Then, on January 15th, when the victim came to Swine Ishii's house, the defendant deliberately lured him into a trap, tricking him into entering the house through the chimney. Underneath the chimney, the defendant had already prepared a giant pot of boiling water, into which the victim fell and was boiled alive in an extremely cruel manner. Moreover, the defendant didn't stop there; he proceeded to eat the boiled remains of the victim.

Charges and penalties: Article 199 of the Japanese Penal Code, Murder, and Article 190 of the Penal Code, Desecration of a Corpse. That is all."

Though she called it the reading of the indictment, she managed to say all of that without looking at a single piece of paper. I have to admit, that's impressive.

But still, I thought it was just murder. I didn’t expect her to bring up desecration of a corpse as well.

"Now then, Uribatake, call your first witness."

"Understood. For my first witness, I call Wolf Miyateru’s friend, Coyote Miyamoto."

In this trial, there's one special rule.

In a trial, a verdict is only reached based on evidence and testimony. No matter how grand of a speech Uribatake or I might give, that alone won’t end this trial. We absolutely need witness testimony.

However, in this case, most of the characters involved are already supposed to be dead. Pork Yoshida, Pig Saito, and even the victim, Wolf Miyateru. Naturally, we can’t call the dead as witnesses.

Therefore, it was decided that we could create witnesses who would testify in line with the general outline of the story... or should I say, the case. Coyote Miyamoto, who doesn’t originally appear in "The Three Little Pigs," is one of those fabricated witnesses.

Alright, let’s see how Uribatake plays her hand. I’ll just sit back and watch for now.

Taking the witness stand was a boy from Class A named Miyamoto. He was about as big as Wolf Miyateru. I don’t know much about him since he’s from a different class, though.

"Now then, Coyote Miyamoto, first, please testify about your relationship with Wolf Miyateru."

"Yes. He and I were in the same soccer club, and we often talked during breaks."

Oh boy.

"You also met with the victim, Wolf Miyateru, the day before he was killed, on the 14th, correct?"

"Yes, we met."

Responding to Uribatake, who was apparently quite popular in Class A, Coyote Miyamoto answered, grinning slightly.

"What did you two talk about?"

"He told me, 'I’m trying to be friends with this piglet named Swine Ishii, but it seems like he hates me, and he's always treating me terribly.' He was venting to me."

"What exactly do you mean by 'treating terribly'?"

"Well, first of all, Wolf Miyateru said he wanted to meet and talk with Swine Ishii, but Swine just holed up in his brick house and wouldn’t come out at all. So, Wolf Miyateru invited him, saying he knew of a field with delicious turnips and asked if he wanted to go together. He agreed, and Wolf Miyateru told him he would pick him up at 3 PM on January 12th.

However, when he went to pick him up at 3 PM as promised, Swine Ishii had already gone by himself and harvested the turnips."

"I see. So, the defendant, Swine Ishii, broke the promise one-sidedly?"

"That’s right. And that’s not all. Desperate to be friends, Wolf Miyateru made another proposal. He said he knew a place where there were delicious apples and asked if Swine wanted to go with him.

But once again, Swine Ishii went early and picked the apples by himself. However, this time, Wolf Miyateru had also left early, so he was able to meet Swine Ishii at the apple tree.

But then Swine Ishii did something unthinkable, betraying Wolf Miyateru’s friendship once again. When he climbed the tree, he pretended to give an apple to Wolf Miyateru, but instead, he threw it as far as he could. While Wolf Miyateru was chasing the apple, Swine Ishii went home by himself."

"Oh my, what a terrible piglet! And then?"

"Even after all that, Wolf Miyateru still didn’t give up on becoming friends. So, on the 15th, the day of the incident, he invited Swine to go to a festival being held in the town of Shanklin."

"And what happened after that?"

"Well, that was the last time I saw him. I don’t know what happened on the 15th."

"Thank you. No further questions."

"Very well. Defense, your cross-examination."

"Got it."

I stood up smoothly.

As expected of Uribatake—she may be rotten, but she’s still good. I didn’t think she’d come at me with this kind of logical progression.

Now then, putting that aside, there’s one inconsistency in that testimony. Let’s point that out first. She probably thought she was following the original storyline, but that’s where she slipped up.

"Alright, Coyote Miyamoto, I have a question. I’ve been listening, and there’s one inconsistency in your testimony."

Coyote Miyamoto flinched.

"Tell me, do you know when turnip harvesting season is?"

"...No, I don’t."

"I’ll tell you. It’s in November. And do you know when apple harvesting season is?"

"...I don’t know."

"Then I’ll tell you. Apple season is in September. So, there’s no way they could’ve gone apple picking the day after they went for turnips!"

There was a murmur in the audience.

"Ugh. Well, that might be true, but—"

Coyote Miyamoto grimaced. But in the next moment—

"Hoo-hoho! What nonsense are you spouting, Satsuki?"

Uribatake’s laughter echoed through the classroom.

"Have you forgotten? The incident supposedly took place in January! Whether it’s apples or turnips, both are out of season!"

"...That makes it even worse."

"..."

The courtroom fell silent for a moment, as if everyone was dumbfounded.

That silence was broken by the judge’s exaggerated cough.

"Ahem. In any case, could both of you refrain from bringing real-world issues into the fictional story of 'The Three Little Pigs'?"

How blunt.

"F-Fine."

I reluctantly agreed. I didn't have much of a choice, did I?

Ugh, it's that useless lawyer who told me, "In cross-examination, just nitpick anything you can," that got me into this mess. Maybe I should get some revenge next time I visit his office.

"Alright, alright. Let's move on to the next question. Coyote Miyamoto, you're saying that Wolf Miyateru just wanted to be friends with the defendant. But he was betrayed over and over again and ended up being treated terribly. In other words, you're saying the defendant is a sly, cunning piglet, aren't you?"

"Well, yes."

"By the way, did you know this?

Your friend, Wolf Miyateru, not only killed and ate the defendant's two brothers, but when he first visited the defendant's house, he threatened him, saying, 'If you don't let me in, I'll huff and puff and blow your house down.'"

"...I've heard rumors about that. But they're just rumors."

"I see. But even if that were true, do you still think your friend, Wolf Miyateru, only wanted to be friends with the defendant?"

"Objection!"

Uribatake raised her hand.

"The defense is asking hypothetical questions and seeking speculative answers from the witness!"

"Objection sustained. Defense, please rephrase your question."

"Fine, fine."

This level of objection was nothing to worry about.

"Coyote Miyamoto, Wolf Miyateru is a wolf, right?"

"Uh, yes, he's a wolf. The name itself says so, Wolf Miyateru."

"Given that fact, it wouldn't be strange at all for him to attack boys—well, piglets, would it?"

"Uh, yes, I suppose."

"No further questions."

That should do it. For now, as long as I can plant the impression that Swine Ishii was in a life-threatening situation, it'll work in my favor.

"The next witness is John Yamamoto."

The boy who took the stand was an average-looking guy from Class A, not particularly memorable.

"First, could you testify about your relationship with the defendant, Swine Ishii?"

"I live near him. He only recently moved into the neighborhood, but when he said he wanted to build a house, I provided him with some bricks."

As a side note, he was also assigned the role of giving bricks during the play.

"I see. Now, do you know what happened at his house on the 15th of this month?"

"Yes, I know a bit about it."

"Could you explain in detail?"

"Around 5 PM on the 15th, I heard some yelling coming from his house."

"What exactly were they yelling about?"

"Well, it seemed like they were arguing about why someone didn't show up to the festival or something like that."

"Interesting. And what happened next?"

"After a while, I heard someone scream, and after that, the arguing stopped. I thought something really strange was going on, so I went to check on his house."

"And what did you see?"

"I looked through the window and saw Swine Ishii cooking something in a pot over the fireplace."

"Do you know what he was cooking?"

"Yes. I managed to get a glimpse inside the pot. To my horror, Wolf Miyateru was being cooked in stew!"

Several members of the audience screamed in shock.

Well, I guess if you picture Wolf Miyateru being simmered in stew, it is kind of scary...

It's a bit funny, though, seeing Wolf Miyateru himself sitting in the gallery with a complex expression on his face.

"And what happened after that?"

"Once Wolf Miyateru was boiled just right, Swine Ishii began eating him with great relish. The scene was so terrifying that I ran away immediately."

"So, he was eating him with great relish?"

"Yes, that’s right."

"No further questions. Satsuki, proceed with your cross-examination."

I didn't need to be told. Internally muttering curses, I launched into my questioning.

"John Yamamoto. You testified that you heard someone screaming around 5 PM on January 15th, right?"

"Yes."

"Then after that, you went to check on his house?"

"Yes."

"And like a peeping tom, you looked inside and saw the defendant making stew, right?"

"Objection! The defense is deliberately using vulgar language to embarrass the witness!"

Vulgar... Well, yeah, I guess it was.

"Fine, I'll rephrase. John Yamamoto, don't you think peeping into someone's house is a bit improper?"

"Objection! John Yamamoto was forced to look inside to investigate the strange situation occurring at the defendant's house! The defense is just trying to mislead the court!"

"I'll allow the objection in this case," said the judge.

"Understood. Next question. You said you looked into the house around 5 PM, right?"

"Yes."

"In January, it's pitch-dark at 5 PM. There wouldn't have been any lights in a brick house like that, so the inside must have been dark too, right?"

"Well, no, actually, the fireplace lit up the room well enough."

"Firelight can only do so much. It's hard to believe you could see every corner of the room."

"Well, yes, that's true."

"Then how could you be so sure that Wolf Miyateru was being cooked in stew in that pot?"

"Uh, well, that's because... Oh right, I could tell by the smell. It was a big pot, and the smell of stew was everywhere."

"I see, the smell. But even if you realized they were making stew, how could you possibly know that it was Wolf Miyateru being cooked in the pot?"

"…That's true, but..."

"Again, how did you know it was Wolf Miyateru?"

"A-After the incident came to light, I heard it from the dog policeman."

"O-Oh really?"

Why is there a dog policeman in this story?

"In any case, your testimony has made one thing clear. At the very least, the room was dimly lit and you couldn't see everything clearly, right?"

"Well, yes, that's true."

"In that case, how could you be so sure that the defendant was eating the victim with great relish?"

The audience murmured.

"...Well, I could see that Swine Ishii's face, illuminated by the firelight, looked very happy."

"So, in other words, there's no real basis for your testimony that he was eating with great relish, is there?"

John Yamamoto glanced apologetically at Uribatake a few times before saying,

"Well, that's just the impression I got from what I saw."

"No further questions!"

Phew. That went well. Uribatake looked a little frustrated too.

"Now, Uribatake, call your next witness."

"No, Your Honor. I have finished calling all the witnesses I need."

The audience tilted their heads in confusion. Of course, they would be puzzled. With the testimonies so far, there's no way she could claim an airtight case for excessive self-defense. There just wasn't enough evidence.

But I understood what Uribatake was trying to do.

"Very well. The defense may now call its witnesses. Satsuki, start with your first witness."

Right. Now that the prosecution was done, it was my turn.

"Alright, for the defense, I call—"

And so, to argue self-defense, I had no choice but to call a certain person to the stand.

"I call the defendant, Swine Ishii!"

A swindler lawyer I know used to say something often: In criminal cases, you should avoid calling the defendant to the stand whenever possible.

The reason is simple. By calling a witness, I'm giving Uribatake the right to cross-examine them. While leading questions aren't allowed in direct examination, they are in cross-examination. In other words, the witness could end up digging their own grave. Uribatake had deliberately ended her case prematurely to save her final strike for cross-examining the defendant.

But there was no way around it this time. I'd just have to walk right into Uribatake's trap.

When Swine Ishii took the stand, I began my questioning.

"Alright then, Swine Ishii. You were invited to the festival by Wolf Miyateru on January 15th, right?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't go with him, did you?"

"That's correct."

"And why was that?"

"Because I couldn't trust him. He's a wolf, after all."

"And why couldn't you trust him?"

"The first time Wolf Miyateru came to my house, he said this...

'Swine Ishii, open up and be my friend,' he said. When I replied, 'No way, not a chance,' he said, 'What? In that case, I'll blow this house down with a huff and a puff!' And he really tried to blow the house down.

But fortunately, my house was made of bricks, so it didn't blow down.

Also, I had two brothers. But their houses were blown down by Wolf Miyateru, and they were eaten. When I think about that, it's clear as day—he was trying to eat me too. There's no way I could trust him."

"Of course. After something like that, it's only natural to be on guard.

Now, I'd like you to testify in detail, step by step, about the events that took place on the 15th."

"Sure. That day, I went to the town of Shanklin by myself. I was looking forward to enjoying the festival, but I also needed a barrel to make butter.

On my way back, I saw Wolf Miyateru coming toward me. I panicked and instinctively hid in the barrel I had just bought. But since the road was sloped, the barrel started rolling. Thanks to that, I managed to avoid being seen and made it home safely.

That evening, Wolf Miyateru came to my house. He said,

'Oh man, that was close! When I was heading to the festival earlier, a huge round thing came rolling down the hill. I was almost crushed!'

So I said to him,

'Haha, that was me. I hid in the barrel and rolled down the hill.'"

"I see. And how did Wolf Miyateru react when he heard that?"

"He suddenly got angry and shouted,

'Damn it! If that's how it is, I'll eat you no matter what! Fine, I'll come down the chimney!'"

"And then what happened?"

"Then he really climbed up onto the roof, and I felt like my life was flashing before my eyes."

"Go on."

"When I looked at the fireplace, I realized I had just boiled some water to make stew for dinner. I quickly took the lid off the pot.

Think about it—I was about to be attacked. My chastity—no, my life was in danger. I was desperate. I never once thought about trying to make him fall in. I just thought that if I opened the lid, the heat would stop him from coming down the chimney.

But before I knew it, Wolf Miyateru had fallen into the pot and was thrashing around.

At that moment, the only thing I knew was that if he got out of that pot, I'd be eaten. I didn't have time to think about anything else. In a daze, I put the lid back on and pressed down on it with all my might."

As expected from someone in the drama club. He rattled off such a long line without hesitation.

"Alright, go on. What happened after that?"

"Yes. After a few minutes, I finally calmed down. When I came to my senses, Wolf Miyateru had already stopped moving in the pot."

"So you killed him?"

"Yes, that’s right."

"And then what did you do?"

"Terrified, I cautiously opened the lid. Inside the pot, Wolf Miyateru, simmered in stew, was still there. When I saw that, I was struck with overwhelming fear.

Wolf Miyateru, all red, looked like he was filled with rage. I even thought he might attack me at any moment. I was so scared. I felt like I couldn’t relax unless I ate him, so I forced him into my mouth."

"Did he taste good?"

"Not at all. Think about it—this is the meat of Wolf Miyateru, a carnivorous beast, simmered in stew. Normally, I’d never want to eat something like that. Even now, when I think back, the meat was tough and it stank. It tasted awful."

His performance was so over-the-top that some of the audience grimaced, as if they were actually imagining what Wolf Miyateru stewed in stew would taste like.

It was a great outcome.

"No further questions."

"Very well. Uribatake, your cross-examination."

"Understood."

Uribatake stood up with a somewhat smug expression.

"Swine Ishii. Your testimony was a remarkable attempt to evoke sympathy, but unfortunately, there are several contradictions in what you said.

Allow me to ask a few questions. First, what time did Wolf Miyateru arrive?"

"I think it was just before 5 PM."

"You testified that you were making stew in a pot large enough for Wolf Miyateru to fit into, correct?"

"Yes."

"In that case, simmering stew in such a large pot wouldn’t be possible in just a few minutes, right?"

"Well, yes, I suppose."

"So that means you must have started making stew no later than around 4:30 PM, right?"

"...Yeah."

"4:30 PM. That’s quite early for dinner, isn’t it? Are you saying you started making stew that early?"

"I think I can make dinner whenever I want."

"Fair enough. Let me ask you another question. You live alone, correct?"

"Yes, according to the setup."

Some of the audience chuckled. He really didn’t need to add unnecessary comments like that.

"You live alone, so why were you making such a large pot of stew?"

Realizing Uribatake's intent, I involuntarily tensed up.

"...I’m a pig. I eat a lot. Besides, I didn’t plan on eating it all at once."

"You testified that you ate Wolf Miyateru, who had been simmered in stew, didn’t you?"

"Yes."

"Did you eat all of him?"

"Yeah, more or less."

"That’s strange. As you can see, Wolf Miyateru is a big guy. He must weigh dozens of kilograms. It’s hard to believe that someone as small as you could eat all that meat."

The courtroom buzzed. Well, that’s understandable.

"I-I ate him over several sittings."

"I see. But that still doesn't make sense. Even if you were in a temporary state of shock after killing Wolf Miyateru, wouldn't you have regained your composure after a night had passed? And yet, you kept eating Wolf Miyateru's stew, even though you said the taste was awful and you didn't want to eat it. I couldn't do that.

Unless, of course, you harbored a deep grudge against Wolf Miyateru."

The audience murmured again.

"Objection! The prosecution isn't asking questions; she's just making assertions!"

"Objection sustained."

"Fine, I'll change the question.

Swine Ishii, you knew that Wolf Miyateru had eaten your two brothers, didn't you?"

"Y-Yes."

"So naturally, you held a grudge against him, didn't you?"

"W-Well, I can't deny it."

"That's all I wanted to hear. No further questions."

Damn it, Uribatake. She's good, even if she's the enemy.

"With that, I believe we've finished questioning all the necessary witnesses?"

The judge asked.

After confirming that both Uribatake and I nodded in agreement, he continued.

"Very well. That concludes the testimony. As per the rules, we will now proceed to closing arguments.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain to everyone present. Closing arguments are where both the defense and the prosecution present their opinions on the application of the law and the evidence presented. The jurors are to listen without preconceptions and use this as material for making a fair judgment in this trial."

Now, the closing arguments will begin, starting with the defense. Satsuki, are you ready?"

"Yes, anytime."

"Very well. You may begin."

I stood up straight and walked to the center of the courtroom.

This is my first time doing closing arguments, but since I'm working every day to become a lawyer, this kind of thing is a piece of cake. After all, even some lazy, incompetent lawyer could do this much. There's no way I can't.

I slowly began addressing the jury.

"Members of the jury. First, I want you to think carefully about the meaning of the term 'self-defense.' Why do you think it is that, even when someone commits the grave crime of killing another, they are found not guilty if it's in self-defense? It's because everyone has the right to protect themselves.

Let me give you all a very simple hypothetical. Okay? What do you think would have happened if the defendant hadn't killed Wolf Miyateru in this case?

I'll reveal the answer later, but first, I want you all to remember something. First, Wolf Miyateru is a wolf, and the defendant is a pig. Also, Wolf Miyateru had already attacked and eaten the defendant's two brothers.

Moreover, Wolf Miyateru visited the defendant's house several days before. He said that if the defendant didn't come out immediately, he would blow the house down. When that attempt failed, he tried various ways to lure the defendant outside with tempting words. But all of those attempts failed.

Then, on the evening of the 15th, the incident occurred. Wolf Miyateru climbed onto the roof and tried to enter through the chimney.

What do you think the defendant should have done upon realizing this? Should he have run away from the house? If he had done that, the wolf would have easily caught up with him—it would have been a futile effort.

Then what? Should he have hidden somewhere? That wouldn't have worked either. Wolves have sharp senses of smell, and he would have been found quickly.

But Swine Ishii had one stroke of luck. At that moment, he was making stew in a large pot, right under the chimney.

The defendant had only two choices. One, do nothing and wait to be eaten by the wolf. Or two, use any means available to protect himself. And the defendant thought of a plan.

If he took the lid off the pot, the hot steam would rise up the chimney. That might stop the wolf from coming down the chimney.

This was the best possible way to protect himself while also driving Wolf Miyateru away. So, the defendant carried out that plan.

However, in the next moment, Wolf Miyateru fell into the pot. This wasn't the defendant's fault. Wolf Miyateru, trying to enter through the chimney on his own, fell right in.

Then the defendant panicked. What should he have done with Wolf Miyateru, who had fallen into the pot? If he had tried to help him out, it's clear to anyone that he would have been eaten next. The defendant had no choice but to take the best possible action to protect himself. How could we punish the defendant under any law for this?

Listen, everyone. Prosecutor Uribatake argued that the defendant had premeditated the killing by boiling the water in advance to prepare for Wolf Miyateru.

Let me say this: that's irrelevant. Why? Because there's no way the defendant could have predicted that Wolf Miyateru would enter through the chimney.

Even if the defendant had somehow anticipated that Wolf Miyateru would come down the chimney and had prepared the pot accordingly, it would still be self-defense. Everyone has the right to take measures to protect themselves, and there is nothing illegal about putting a pot on the fire in one's own fireplace.

And one more thing. As for the fact that the defendant ended up eating Wolf Miyateru, that doesn't make him guilty of anything either.

Think about it. The wolf had killed and eaten his two brothers, and for days had been hunting him, trying to kill him. Now, here was that same wolf, simmering in stew in the pot, with a face that looked like it would attack at any moment.

Do you think the defendant could have remained calm while sitting next to that corpse? The only way the defendant could regain his peace of mind was to eat every last bit of Wolf Miyateru, who had been cooked in the stew. The law is clear on this too. If a crime is committed while someone is in a state of mental breakdown—when they aren't calm—they cannot be punished.

Everyone. Lastly, let me remind you of the question I asked earlier.

What do you think would have happened if the defendant hadn't killed Wolf Miyateru in this case? The answer is simple: the one who would have been eaten was the defendant. There's no doubt about it.

That's all I have to say."

The room fell completely silent. Well, that went about as well as I could have hoped. Take that, Uribatake.

…Or so I thought, but when I looked over at Uribatake, she was looking at me with that infuriating smirk on her face.

"Now, last but not least, Prosecutor Uribatake, your closing statement."

"Yes, Your Honor."

Uribatake flashed that smile that some of the boys seem to like for some reason.

"Members of the jury. First, I ask that you consider what I am about to say.

The defendant boiled Wolf Miyateru to death, and then ate him. This is a fact that the defendant has admitted. However, the defendant claims that he did this because his life was in danger, and that he ate him while in a state of confusion. The defendant also insists that the method of killing was not premeditated, but merely an accident.

But was that really the case?

Please remember this.

The defendant's two brothers were killed and eaten by Wolf Miyateru. The defendant harbored a deep grudge because of this. Remember, these are the defendant's own words. Of course, there is room for sympathy regarding his situation, but that does not give him the right to kill Wolf Miyateru.

As the defendant continued to interact with Wolf Miyateru, he eventually came up with a terrible plan. He would lure Wolf Miyateru into entering the house through the chimney, and by boiling stew under the chimney, he could kill him under the guise of an accident. And just like his brothers were treated, this time he would eat the simmered Wolf Miyateru as stew. There could be no better revenge for his brothers.

The defendant said that Wolf Miyateru came to his house around 5 PM on the 15th. And that he had been making stew since around 4:30 PM.

Think about that. At 4:30 PM, he was making stew in a pot large enough to fit a person. No matter how much the defense tells you, this is clearly unnatural.

There is only one possible explanation. The defendant had prepared the stew in advance, with the intention of killing Wolf Miyateru. This was not self-defense at all; it was a premeditated murder.

Of course, Wolf Miyateru should be held accountable for trying to break in through the chimney. But it was the defendant who set things up to make that happen. The defendant had been provoking Wolf Miyateru for days, saying things that would make him angry. All of it was to set up the plan to kill him.

This is not self-defense, nor is it even excessive self-defense.

Of course, it's undeniable that Wolf Miyateru killed the defendant's brothers and was also after the defendant's life. In that respect, there was certainly room for self-defense. However, this premeditated murder does not qualify as self-defense in any way. And as for the fact that the defendant ate Wolf Miyateru, there is no justification for that whatsoever.

The defendant said he was terrified that Wolf Miyateru might move at any moment, but that reasoning has no validity whatsoever. If he was truly afraid, he could have just dug a hole outside and buried him.

Also, the stew of Wolf Miyateru weighed tens of kilograms. The defendant ate it all by himself. And while he claimed that the meat was awful and hard to eat, that sounds like a lie to me.

Remember, everyone. The defendant is a pig. Pigs are naturally omnivorous, and they'll eat anything, meat included. There's no doubt that the wolf meat simmered in stew must have tasted delicious to him. Otherwise, how could he have eaten tens of kilograms of meat all by himself?

Ladies and gentlemen, it's clear to anyone that the defendant is guilty of excessive self-defense and of desecrating a corpse. While there may be grounds for some sympathy toward the defendant, he must still be held accountable for the premeditated murder and the crime of corpse desecration. Please do not be swayed by the defense attorney's fantasies and deliver the correct judgment.

That is all."

The courtroom fell silent.

It would be nice if the silence was because they were dumbfounded, but unfortunately, that didn't seem to be the case.

Damn, she’s really done it.

After hearing a performance like that, it’s certain that some of the jurors would be influenced. Now I’m starting to feel a little scared about the outcome.

"With that, all necessary procedures of the trial have been completed.

The jury and I will now move to a separate room to deliberate on the verdict. I ask that everyone else remain here for a moment."

The judge concluded with those words.

◆

…I thought the verdict would be done in about five minutes, but strangely enough, even after ten minutes, then twenty minutes, there was still no result. It’s hard to describe how irritated both Uribatake and I were.

By the time the judge and the jury returned, thirty minutes had already passed.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I apologize for the delay.

There were some differing opinions among the jurors, so it took a bit of time.

Now then, jury foreman, please stand."

One of the female jurors stood up. She was from another class, so I didn’t know her name.

"Jury foreman, have you reached a verdict?"

"Yes."

"Please present it."

"Understood."

At this point, the jury foreman cleared her throat theatrically and then pulled out a sheet of manuscript paper and began to read.

Even I couldn’t help but feel my hands trembling at that moment. I’d gone all out for my first-ever closing argument. If I lost here, I wouldn’t be able to face my classmates, and the word ‘loser’ should only ever be directed at Uribatake.

"We, the jury, have reached the following conclusion:

Both the defense and prosecution’s arguments were highly persuasive. We were torn, deeply torn.

And after much deliberation… we started to feel like it didn’t really matter either way."

'…Huh?'

Uribatake and I both spoke in unison.

"And so, this conclusion is based on a suggestion from the judge: Rather than performing an outdated play like ‘The Three Little Pigs,’ wouldn’t it be far more entertaining to stage this trial as a play instead? That is our conclusion."

'…Huh?'

As Uribatake and I stared in disbelief—

Applause erupted from the gallery, and the jury’s decision was accepted, becoming a final resolution accompanied by cheers and celebration.

◆

Epilogue.

Apparently, this year’s theater festival was the most lively one in recent years, or so they say.

My record against Uribatake: One win, zero losses, one draw.

Reference:

From "The World of Picture Books Series, Volume 1: The Three Little Pigs" (Illustrations by Yoko Imoto, Text by Akiko Sueyoshi, Published by Kodansha).

はじめてのさいばん
ノンフィクション編

My First Trial: Non-Fiction Edition

“What the hell are you doing with the wheat I grew!?”

The time is the 16th century, the place is the Autun region of France.

Joseph (a pseudonym), a farmer, was furious with a group of thieves.

It was no wonder he was angry. The thieves, working in a gang, had come and stolen the wheat that Joseph had painstakingly cultivated, greedily devouring it.

Moreover, the damage wasn’t just a one-time or two-time event, nor was Joseph the only victim. The number of victims had grown to an incalculable size.

This was already a time when the food supply was unstable. Even losing a small amount of wheat was a life-or-death issue for the people, and their anger had reached its peak.

The governor, seeing the gravity of the situation, took the bold step of formally accusing the criminals. As a result, a trial was finally set to begin in the church’s court.

The bishop, who was in charge of overseeing the trial, captured one of the criminals and ordered them to appear in court. Furthermore, as was customary in any trial, no matter how wicked the defendant might be, they had the right to a defense attorney. The bishop appointed a defense attorney.

The man chosen was Barthélemy de Chasseneuz. He was a legal scholar who had gained fame as a courtroom attorney, known for his clever defense strategies and courtroom tactics.

Soon, the stage was set. The defendant was brought into the court, and the trial was about to begin.

However, there was one problem.

The defendant was a notorious criminal who had repeatedly stolen people’s precious food, and there were numerous eyewitnesses who had seen the crime. In a trial where the crime was this easy to prove, the trial should have been a mere formality, with the defendant quickly sentenced.

But that wasn’t the case in this trial.

The person who was the defendant—no, even the use of that term was a bit strange.

Because the defendant was a rat.

◆

The bishop, who was to preside as the judge, had been in a gloomy mood since morning.

If the door in front of him were opened, he would find himself in the courtroom. There would be the defense attorney, the prosecutor, a crowd of spectators, and—of course—the defendant. Yes, the defendant, who was a rat.

Even though it was part of his job, why on earth did he have to preside over a trial with a rat as the defendant? Was he really supposed to go through the process of reading the charges to a rat? It was ludicrous. It was impossible to take this seriously.

But, as they say, "service to the court is inevitable." This was still part of his duty. Moreover, most of the farmers wanted the rat to be punished in this trial. And that wasn't all. Recently, governance hadn't been going too well, and this trial was seen as necessary to divert the farmers' growing discontent.

To begin with, it wasn't like they were seeking damages from the rat, nor were they trying to impose criminal penalties. Even if the rat were to lose, the only punishment would be excommunication.

To be forsaken by God—there is nothing more terrifying for a human being. But could a rat truly repent of its sins after being excommunicated?

The absurdity of it all was overwhelming. Still, he couldn't afford to be careless.

"The judge is entering! All rise!"

As the bailiff's voice rang out, the door before him swung open.

There was no more time to dwell on the matter. He strode into the courtroom with a resolute attitude, heading toward the high seat prepared for the judge.

After taking his seat, the man who would now be referred to as the judge solemnly declared:

"Let the trial of the rat begin."

"Uh, before we proceed, may I say something, Your Honor?"

A short, middle-aged prosecutor spoke in a flustered voice.

“What is it, Prosecutor Horiuche?”

“Your Honor, wasn’t Barthélemy de Chasseneuz supposed to serve as the defense attorney for this trial?"

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Then why—”

Prosecutor Horiuche directed a suspicious glance toward the front of the courtroom.

“Why is that person sitting in his place?”

All eyes in the courtroom turned toward the man seated where Chasseneuz should have been.

The man had an appearance that was, to say the least, unusual.

First, the color of his skin. It was neither yellow nor beige, but it definitely wasn’t the skin tone of an ordinary Frenchman.

Well, it was known that there were people from the Far East who had skin that wasn’t black or white. Everyone assumed that he must be one of those people from a distant Eastern land.

But what caught people’s attention the most about the man was the sharpness of his eyes.

If there truly were a devil who whispered sweet temptations and led people to hell, he would no doubt have eyes like this man. His gaze was so piercing and sinister that everyone in the room felt the same way.

"Excuse me, you there. May I ask you something?"

The prosecutor asked hesitantly.

"Yes, what is it?"

The man puffed out his chest and answered calmly, unfazed by the attention.

"I’ll get straight to the point… Who are you?"

"Ah. I’m the defendant’s attorney."

"But the defense attorney should be Mr. Chasseneuz."

"Unfortunately, Mr. Chasseneuz is feeling a bit under the weather. He’s currently recuperating at home, so he personally asked me to act as his substitute."

"I see. So, Mr. Chasseneuz is unwell."

"Yes. I was also quite surprised by the sudden request, but I couldn’t refuse his personal plea."

“Well, if that’s the case, it can’t be helped…

Still, if the defense attorney was going to change at the last minute, I would have appreciated at least a heads-up beforehand.”

“My apologies, it was all very sudden.”

The man bowed deeply. But his face showed no sign of guilt; in fact, it even bore a somewhat brazen smile. Of course, the judge noticed this, but since the man had offered an apology, even if just for show, it was difficult to treat him with hostility.

“Still, it’s strange. If you’re a lawyer capable enough to be entrusted by Mr. Chasseneuz, I would have thought I’d have met you at least once before. I must say, you don’t seem familiar. If you don’t mind, could you tell us your name?”

“Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Zhenco Yamashika. I come from a distant land in the Far East.”

"Ah, that’s quite a unique name. As I thought, you’re from the East.

By the way, your name sounds somewhat similar to the prosecutor’s. Prosecutor Horiuche, do you know this man?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

Prosecutor Horiuche replied with a look of utter distaste, as if he were chewing on something bitter.

“I see. If you’re acquainted with Prosecutor Horiuche, and Mr. Chasseneuz himself asked you to substitute for him, then it seems there’s no issue with your qualifications as the defense attorney.

Well then, let’s proceed. Prosecutor, please read the charges.”

“Understood.”

With that, Prosecutor Horiuche rose, holding a parchment in his hand.

“The defendant in person, the rat, stands accused of—”

At that moment, it happened.

“Objection!”

The defense attorney suddenly slammed his hand onto the desk. So hard, in fact, that it looked as though the desk might break.

The resounding bang echoed through the courtroom, causing everyone to flinch.

Then, with all eyes on him, the defense attorney shouted:

“That was clearly incorrect! It is obvious to everyone that the defendant is not a person!”

Well, of course, thought the judge, groaning inwardly.

‘Here we go,’ thought the prosecutor, already resigned.

Both of them had anticipated this turn of events. Even if it had been Chasseneuz, he would have made the same argument. Any lawyer who was bound by duty to protect the rights of the defendant would naturally make such a claim.

However, as a practical matter, who would be troubled by calling the rat defendant in human terms? Do they think the rat would dislike it?

That being said, the judge had no choice but to acknowledge the objection. Since the rat was brought into court as a defendant, it had to be given all the appropriate rights.

“...Indeed, it might not have been the correct expression. However, calling it something like a ‘rat defendant’ also seems odd. How about we simply refer to it as usual?”

Fortunately, the defense lawyer did not raise any further objections.

The judge felt a dull headache. This was still just the reading of the indictment, and they were only at the beginning. If it was like this from the start, what on earth would happen later?

“Both sides seem to have no issue. Then, Prosecutor, please continue in that manner.”

The judge’s statement came across as somewhat lacking in enthusiasm, but no one questioned his responsibility because of it.

“Y-Yes, understood. Let me resume. Ahem, the defendant, the rat—”

“Objection!”

A loud sound, like thunder striking.

Here we go again—the judge would have held his head in his hands if there weren’t so many people watching.

Without any regard for the judge’s inner turmoil, the defense lawyer shouted angrily.

“Your Honor! The name ‘rat’ that the prosecution has just used is inappropriate as a name for the defendant! It’s akin to saying, ‘the human defendant.’ Without a name that can distinguish this individual, a fair trial cannot proceed!”

“W-Wait a moment,” Prosecutor Horiuche countered this time. “Your Honor, I don’t think that rats, as creatures, even have the concept of a name—ah, no, um, never mind. I apologize.”

He had realized that if he started bringing up concepts like that, the trial wouldn’t make any sense.

The judge sighed again and turned back to the defense lawyer. If someone referred to a human defendant as “the human defendant,” anyone would object, of course. The defense lawyer’s objection had to be recognized.

“Counsel Yamashika, what you’re saying is that we need a name to distinguish this rat from the others, correct?”

“Yes, something like that.”

“Then, how about temporarily giving the defendant a name just for the duration of this trial?”

“Well, I guess that can’t be helped. Otherwise, the trial won’t proceed.”

'If that’s how you feel, then don’t raise unnecessary objections in the first place'—the judge and Prosecutor Horiuche shared the same thought but kept it to themselves.

“Alright, then. Let’s move on. Defense counsel, do you have any suggestions for a name?”

The judge half-heartedly asked the question with a hint of sarcasm. However, the defense attorney responded boldly.

“Your Honor, I do have a proposal. How about ‘Trotting Rattaro’?”

“...”

The judge remained silent for a moment, then, with an expression more serious than necessary, asked:

“...Counsel Yamashika.”

“Yes?”

“I understand that ‘Trotting’ refers to the way rats scurry around, but what exactly does the ‘Taro’ part mean?”

“It's a common name in my homeland. It’s like calling someone ‘George’ in English.”

“I see, I understand. This is France, but, well, that’s fine.

However... how should I put this, the name seems to have a somewhat dangerous ring to it.”

“Dangerous ring... you say?”

“This is purely a judge’s intuition, but using that name isn’t going to get us sued by anyone, is it? As in, future hamster fans?”

“There should be no problem.”

The lawyer answered firmly.

“...You seem awfully confident. Do you have any basis for that?”

“Well, just a hunch.”

The lawyer answered firmly again.

The judge was once again seized by the urge to hold his head in his hands.

“...Fine. We’ll go with that for now. Let’s proceed with ‘Trotting Rattaro.’ Prosecutor Horiuche, please continue.”

“Y-Your Honor, I hesitate to say this, but are you sure you’re not getting a little reckless here?”

“Just get on with it!”

“Y-Yes, understood.”

Prosecutor Horiuche cleared his throat and composed himself before continuing.

“Ahem, now then. The defendant, Trotting Rattaro, and his accomplices have ravaged the crops painstakingly grown by the farmers, causing immense damage to the people.

The defendants, under the cover of night when people were asleep, formed a gang and broke into food storage rooms and fields, repeatedly committing heinous acts, indiscriminately devouring precious food.

Moreover, this was not a one-time or two-time offense. The defendants, for decades—no, for centuries—have committed similar crimes under malicious intent, continually causing suffering to the people.

The charge and the law: Article 235 of the Criminal Code, Theft. That is all.”

The judge tilted his head slightly. Was there really an Article 235 in this country’s criminal code?

However, he didn’t want to further confuse the trial, and since the defense lawyer didn’t seem inclined to object, he decided to leave it alone.

“Alright. Now, moving on—”

As he remembered what came next, the judge’s face unconsciously stiffened.

“—Let’s proceed with the acknowledgment or denial of the charges. Will the defendant please come forward?”

The time had finally come. The most ridiculous moment where he would have to ask a rat whether it had committed a crime.

Soon, the rat, placed in a cage, was brought to the witness stand by an attendant. Rather, it was placed on the stand.

It suddenly struck the judge that this rat was unusually large and not one he had seen before. It was about the size of a cat, and instead of the usual gray, it had a yellowish tint.

Well, there are all kinds of rats, and this one was chosen as a representative. Someone must have gone out of their way to bring such a large rat—the judge concluded, and began the formalities.

“Now, Mr. Trotting Rattaro. First, you have the right to remain silent. You may choose to answer questions or remain silent. However, anything you say may be used against you. Do you understand?”

Naturally, the unusually large rat said nothing.

“...Very well, I’ll ask. Do you admit to the charges against you?”

'This is absurd.' At least, that’s what the judge thought. There was no way a rat could answer such a question.

However, by some strange coincidence, that rat, while on the stand, gave an answer—rather, it squeaked.

“Pika-chu?”

“Guards!” The judge, his face pale, shouted. “This may indeed be a rat, but something seems off! There’s something very wrong here. Take it away immediately and fetch another one!”

The courtroom erupted into chaos.

As the yellow rat was hastily removed, the judge thought to himself.

Why didn’t anyone notice this until now?

Eventually, a new defendant was brought in, the courtroom returned to silence, and the acknowledgment or denial of the charges resumed.

After all, the defendant had been replaced at the last minute. In the judge’s career, something like this had never happened before. Normally, the defense would have raised at least one or two objections, if not requested a postponement or cancellation of the trial entirely, but for some reason, the defense attorney simply observed with a smirk. The judge felt an overwhelming urge to throw his gavel at him but miraculously held back.

“Now, let me ask the defendant again. Do you acknowledge the prosecution’s claims?”

This time, the defendant was about the size of a palm, didn't squeak, had no red circles on its cheeks. It didn’t even squeak "chu-chu", just sat quietly in the cage, looking frightened.

“Your Honor, the defendant is exercising its right to remain silent.”

The defense lawyer interjected.

The judge wanted to ask, 'Can you understand rat language?' but somehow managed to suppress the urge with reason.

“...Very well. Let’s just leave it at that. Now, let’s proceed with the defense’s opening statement. Is that alright, defense counsel?”

“Yes,” the defense counsel stood up and began to speak calmly.

“First of all, I must say that the prosecution’s claims are utterly unacceptable.

It’s true that Trotting Rattaro and his companions have stolen valuable food from people time and again. That is a fact, and we also acknowledge that it has caused harm to many people.

However, they did so because it was necessary for them to survive, and historically, they have lived in this way in order to survive.

Prosecutor Horiuche claimed that these actions were carried out with malicious intent. But the rats did not act with such malice. Just as we humans breathe as a matter of course, the rats simply ate the food in front of them as a natural means of survival. I repeat, they did this to survive, and it was a necessary action.

However, as a result, their actions did harm us humans. That’s why, for hundreds of years, we have exterminated and driven away countless rats."

The defense attorney shrugged.

“It’s a case of both sides being at fault, wouldn’t you say? That’s how we have interacted with them all this time, and that’s how it will continue in the future. The only thing I want to make absolutely clear is that it is absurd to try to judge these rats by human law. That’s all I have to say.

I’m finished.”

It was quieter than expected. That was the impression the judge had. After making such a strong objection earlier, what had changed? Or perhaps—was this the calm before the storm?

“Well then, let’s move on to the prosecution’s witness examination. Prosecutor Horiuche, please proceed.”

“Understood. The prosecution calls Mr. Joseph as its first witness.”

The witness who took the stand was a simple, unremarkable middle-aged farmer.

“First, could you please state your name and occupation?”

The judge asked.

“I’m a farmer, the name’s Joseph.”

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in accordance with your conscience?”

“Yes, I swear.”

“Very well, you may proceed with the questioning.”

Prosecutor Horiuche stood up and approached the witness stand, beginning his questioning.

“Now, Mr. Joseph, could you testify about what you experienced last autumn?”

“Understood. It was last autumn, just after the barley harvest. I carefully stored the freshly harvested barley in the warehouse.

But after a few days, when I opened the warehouse, it was a disaster.”

“What did you find?”

“A good portion of the precious barley had disappeared.”

“Do you know who was responsible?”

“Of course. The moment I opened the warehouse door, dozens of rats scattered. On top of that, the remaining barley was mixed with rat droppings. It was obvious who the culprit was.”

Joseph pointed angrily at the rat in the defendant’s seat.

“It was that one! That rat ate my precious barley!”

“That’s right! That rat ruined my barley too!”

“They’re the ones to blame!”

Perhaps emboldened by Joseph’s passion, the spectators began to stir.

“Order, please, order.”

The judge lightly tapped the gavel and calmed the increasingly excited spectators.

“Your Honor, that concludes my questioning.”

“Very well. Defense counsel, cross-examination?”

“Understood.”

Attorney Yamashika stood up, approached the witness stand just as Prosecutor Horiuche had, and began his cross-examination.

“Mr. Joseph, according to your testimony, the defendant and his companions ate the barley you had stored carefully—is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Well, if that’s the case, there seems to be something strange about your claim.”

“S-Strange? What do you mean?”

“Was it really Trotting Rattaro that you saw?”

“...W-What are you implying?”

“Let me rephrase. Can you tell the difference between rats? For example, if I brought several rats of the same species as the defendant, could you pick out Trotting Rattaro from among them?”

“N-No, I don’t think I could. B-But it must have been one of his companions who did it!”

“Oh, that’s strange as well. If you can’t tell rats apart, how could you identify Rattaro’s companions? Or are you saying that just because they’re all rats, they must all be accomplices?”

“Wait a minute, Your Honor, I object.”

Prosecutor Horiuche spoke up.

“This trial is about all rats. The defendant is merely here as a representative. The defense attorney’s argument is off-point.

And I’d like to ask the defense attorney—can you prove that it wasn’t the defendant or his companions who ate Mr. Joseph’s barley?”

The defense attorney shrugged casually and raised both hands in a gesture of surrender.

“You make a fair point. Indeed, I cannot tell rats apart either. But what this means is that no one can prove that the defendant ate Mr. Joseph’s barley. He may have eaten it, or he may not have. However, since the principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty’ applies in court—”

“That’s enough.”

The judge cut him off somewhat forcefully.

“Whether the rat committed the crime or not is for me, the judge, to determine. After hearing the arguments from both the prosecution and the defense, if I believe the defendant did steal the barley, I will impose a penalty. If not, I will find him not guilty. That’s all a trial is. Defense counsel, proceed with your next question.”

The defense attorney appeared somewhat dissatisfied.

However, if the principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty’ were applied, the rat would undoubtedly be acquitted. If that were to happen, there could be an uproar from the gallery. At the very least, this argument had to be forcefully concluded under the judge’s authority.

The defense attorney turned back to the witness stand and asked his next question.

“Mr. Joseph. I will no longer ask whether the defendant actually ate your precious barley. However, there is one more thing I must ask you.”

“W-What is it?”

“According to your testimony, you didn’t actually see the rats eating the barley, did you?”

“Well, no... the rats always scatter the moment you open the storage door.”

“Rats are omnivorous, aren’t they?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“So, they don’t necessarily live by eating barley?”

“Well, I suppose that’s true, but...”

“In other words, isn’t it possible that someone other than the rats stole your precious barley?”

“...B-But the remaining barley was mixed with rat droppings! It couldn’t have been anyone else but them!”

“But you testified that you didn’t actually see the rats eating the barley, didn’t you?”

"…Ah, well."

Perhaps the spectators had found some point in the defense attorney's argument that they could agree with, as the courtroom fell silent.

"Or, isn't it possible that someone who bore a grudge against you stole the barley and scattered rat droppings to make it look like rats were responsible?"

"N-No way! I've never lived in a way that would make anyone hate me!"

"Don't you think grudges are something you can accumulate without even realizing it?"

"Objection!" Prosecutor Horiuche stood up. "That question has no relevance to this trial!"

The defense attorney shrugged without offering any rebuttal and returned to his seat.

"That concludes my questioning."

"…Very well. Mr. Joseph, you may step down. Prosecutor, call your next witness."

"The next witness is also a farmer, Ms. Marie."

The person who took the stand was a middle-aged woman. Like Joseph, she wasn't dressed particularly well, but her eyes were red, and she looked as if she might burst into tears at any moment.

"Your family runs a farm, correct?"

"Yes."

"Do you have children?"

"That question's answer would be no. I had children."

"So, they're no longer with us?"

"That's right. This past winter."

Her voice trembled.

"What was the cause of death?"

"Starvation. The rats devoured our precious food, causing my children to starve to death. If we had had food, my children could have lived longer."

"That will be all."

Prosecutor Horiuche finished quietly, his face unusually somber.

"Defense counsel, cross-examination?"

"Yes."

Attorney Yamashika stood up, but unlike before, he didn't immediately begin questioning.

This was a mother who had lost her children to starvation. To ask her, as he had Joseph, "Did you really see the rats devouring the barley?" would be far too insensitive and would draw the ire of the courtroom.

After a brief moment of consideration, Attorney Yamashika asked the following question:

"Ms. Marie, first of all, I would like to offer my deepest condolences for the loss of your children."

"Thank you."

"However, this is a trial. As the defense attorney, I am obligated to ask you some questions in defense of the accused.

For now, I will refrain from questioning whether your children's death by starvation was truly caused by rats devouring your food, or whether it was indeed the rats that did the damage."

His tone was unusually sharp, but no one pointed it out.

"Let me ask you directly. You, of course, believe that all living beings, including your children, have the right to live, correct?"

"Of course."

"One more question. Have you ever killed a rat?"

"…I won't say I haven't. But… but, it was to protect our food. I killed the rats because I had to survive."

"I see, so you killed rats to protect your food, to survive. And you claim that was an unavoidable action, correct?"

"…Yes."

"By your logic, wouldn't it also be true that the rats eating the barley to survive was a justifiable act? Furthermore, while the rats only ate the barley, you killed the rats. In terms of the severity of the crime, doesn't that make your actions graver?"

The spectators began to stir.

On one side, a mother who had lost her children to hunger. On the other, a defense attorney who was comparing her children to rats, the scourge of the land. The courtroom erupted with jeers, and the judge, tired of the commotion, worked to restore order.

"Cross-examination is concluded."

"Very well. Prosecutor, call your next witn—"

Just as the judge was about to speak, it happened.

"Excuse me, Your Honor, may I have a moment?"

It was the defense attorney again.

"What is it this time?"

"Your Honor, I would like to propose something."

'This is definitely going to be something ridiculous,' the judge instinctively thought.

"…Let's hear it."

His position made it impossible to simply dismiss the request.

"Based on the current proceedings, as the defense attorney responsible for protecting the defendant's rights, I must say that this trial is meaningless.

The prosecution has been calling witnesses, but their arguments are aimed at condemning rats as a whole.

Rats that could be considered defendants are everywhere. To summon just one rat here and treat it as representative of all others in this trial is inappropriate."

"Surely, defense counsel," Prosecutor Horiuche scoffed, "you're not suggesting we drag every rat in the area into this courtroom?"

"I'm not saying that. However, if we continue like this, it will be impossible to conduct a fair trial.

Please allow me to offer a hypothetical. Let's say there are two villages, and one village sues the other for the improper use of water. In that case, what would happen? At the very least, the sued village would be notified of the charges against them, and they would be summoned to court to defend themselves.

Now, let's turn back to this trial. It's clear from the proceedings that this trial is addressing all rats.

I believe you understand what I'm getting at. If we are to conduct a fair trial, at the very least, we must notify all the rats in the district that they are being sued and summon them to court to defend themselves."

The judge was taken aback.

A solid argument. It was undeniably a sound argument. If a trial is to be held, it must be fair. And fairness demands that the defense attorney's claims be addressed.

However, even if they issued such summonses to the rats, it wouldn't work, and if they had to notify every district, who knows how many months that would take.

"Prosecutor Horiuche, do you have a rebuttal?"

Since the defense attorney's argument held up on principle, the judge would have to accept it unless the prosecution could object. But if they accepted it, they would have to issue summonses to rats, an absurd task that would take months.

At this point, the outcome of the trial hinged on Prosecutor Horiuche's rebuttal. Yet, the prosecutor didn't even pretend to deliberate. He simply shrugged.

"Unfortunately, Your Honor, the defense counsel's argument is entirely correct."

(Why are you agreeing with him?!)

But fortunately, Prosecutor Horiuche didn't seem to be cornered in the slightest.

"However, I would like to remind everyone of one thing. Allow me to borrow Attorney Yamashika's example.

Let's say there are two villages, and one sues the other. As the defense attorney mentioned, the sued village would be notified by the court and summoned to defend themselves. Now, what happens if no one from the defendant's village shows up? It's simple: the defendant is considered to have admitted to all charges, and the plaintiff automatically wins the case."

The judge almost wanted to applaud.

Yes, in being overwhelmed by the defense attorney, he had forgotten the key point. Brilliant, as expected of Prosecutor Horiuche. Even if they issued summonses to rats, none would show up. In that case, the defendant would lose by default. There would be no further need to continue this ridiculous trial.

The judge, working hard to keep his satisfaction from showing, turned back towards the defense attorney.

"Counsel Yamashika, Prosecutor Horiuche has expressed his thoughts, but after all, this was your proposal. You're not going to withdraw it now, are you?"

With a slight hint of sarcasm, he said this, partly to vent his pent-up frustration.

But the defense attorney, as expected, didn't seem flustered in the slightest.

"Of course not, Your Honor. I wouldn't retract a proposal I made myself.

I only ask for one thing: that the summons notice be written in a language the rats can understand."

"Ugh."

The judge turned pale again, but Prosecutor Horiuche quickly dispelled his concerns.

"If that's the case, there's no need to worry. After all, no one can prove that rats can't understand our language. Issuing the summons in our official language should suffice."

That seemed to be the final blow. This time, the defense attorney didn't offer any further objections.

Well, the defense attorney was originally here as a representative of Mr. Chasseneuz. As long as he could buy time, that would be enough to save face. In any case, this farce could finally come to an end—the judge eagerly grabbed his gavel.

"A conclusion has been reached. To ensure a fair trial, a summons will be issued to all the rats in the district, instructing them to appear in this court to defend themselves. Until that notice has been issued, the trial will be indefinitely adjourned. Neither the prosecution nor the defense has any objections, correct?"

Neither of them said a word.

"Very well. Today's proceedings are concluded."

But unfortunately—

The trial never ended in the way the judge had hoped.

Despite a lengthy period passing before the trial was finally reconvened, and despite the summons being issued to all the rats, not a single one voluntarily appeared in court. Up to this point, everything was going according to Prosecutor Horiuche's predictions.

Of course, he reiterated his stance: the rats had forfeited their chance to defend themselves because they acknowledged their guilt. Therefore, there was no longer any need for further proceedings, and a verdict should be rendered immediately.

However, Attorney Yamashika, who had come in place of Chasseneuz—who had once again fallen ill—argued the following:

"The reason the rats have not appeared is not because they admitted their guilt, but because they were unable to come to this court.

The reason being, there are natural predators—cats—everywhere above ground.

Even if it were not rats but humans, if going to the courthouse were dangerous, they would not be obliged to respond to any summons.

Therefore, until guarantees for the safe passage of all rats to this court are ensured, the trial should be postponed!"

Prosecutor Horiuche was ultimately unable to refute this argument.

And so, the trial faded into obscurity, disappearing from history, with no record of the final outcome...

◆

"And that's the dream I had!"

"…You're reading too many weird books."

The book Satsuki was reading: "The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals"

(Edward Payson Evans, translated by Toru Endo, Seikyusha Publishing)

Afterword

To all the readers, I hope this finds you in good health.

Due to various circumstances, it's been half a year since the release of the previous volume, Tactical Volume 6. I deeply apologize for the delay. However, the next volume of Tactical is scheduled to come out next month, which is an unusually rare occurrence, so I would be very grateful if you could hang in there just a little longer and not give up on us.

Well now… Since it's been half a year, I'm desperately trying to remember how to write an afterword, but nothing is coming to mind. I suppose there's no real "right" way to write an afterword anyway, but even so, it's incredibly hard to get started this time.

On top of that, due to various reasons, I don't have much space for this afterword. Not to mention, Volume 7 of Tactical is scheduled for release next month, and, believe it or not, I'm already four days past the deadline! So, yes, things are quite chaotic at the moment. I really wonder if we'll be able to release it next month. Even I'm worried about it.

Anyway, it wouldn't do to just write about this kind of stuff, so let me at least give you a brief update, as one would expect in an afterword.

For the sake of both ideas and health, I decided to get a brain scan.

When they took cross-sectional images of my brain using a CRT, they found something white in there.

According to the doctor:

"Hmm, there's a possibility it could be a parasite."

I was shocked.

Some of my colleagues, including my editor and fellow writers, joked that perhaps the true essence of Toru Shiwasu is actually that parasite. I couldn't entirely deny it either, considering how I sometimes wake up to find unfamiliar text already entered into my manuscript.

For the record, three weeks later, I received the diagnosis that said, "There's absolutely nothing to worry about, you're fine." But I'm still a bit concerned if everything is truly okay.

So, if someday in the future, there's a news report about a desperate man with a knife storming the Fujimi Publishing office, rest assured that it's not his fault. He's probably being controlled by the parasite in his brain and therefore holds no personal responsibility.

I guess that's about it. When you're holed up at home writing all the time, you really run out of things to talk about.

I hope we can meet again in the near future… or so I'd like to think.

Toru Shiwasu

P.S.

For the short story "A New Theory: The Three Little Pigs" included in this book, I referred to materials distributed on the website of the Ibaraki Castle Legal Education Research Association. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank G, the lawyer who kindly allowed me to use his materials, as well as the Bar Association that introduced me to him.

師走トオル

しわすとおる●埼玉県在住。『タクティカル・ジャッジメント』で第2回富士見ヤングミステリー大賞準入選に選ばれる。同作にて作家デビュー。その後、新シリーズ『がらくたのフロンティア』を発表。ゲームと名のつくものなら、なんでも大好き。最近は、オヤジギャグ増加の傾向にあるようだが、本人に自覚はない……ようだ。

BOOK☆WALKER